



HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH  
IN  
INDIA

JOHN CORREIA - AFONSO

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# *Historical Research in India*

*edited by*  
**John Correia-Afonso**  
Director  
Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture



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## Foreword

It can be said without fear of contradiction that the greatest work of Fr. Henry Heras was neither his archaeological findings nor his historical writings, but the formation of eminent archaeologists and historians and the foundation of the Indian Historical Research Institute where he trained them. The Indian Historical Research Institute—later named the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture—was a pioneer institution in the field of historical investigation. Hence it was fitting that the Golden Jubilee of the Institute in 1976 should have been marked by two important meetings in which distinguished historians and university teachers from various parts of India concerned themselves with historical research in this country.

The pages that follow contain papers read at the seminar on "The Guidance of Historical Research" and the symposium on "The Future of Historical Research in India," together with reports and comments. Though unavoidably late, it is hoped that the publication will be of interest and value to students and teachers of history. Not all the material of the seminar has been reproduced: the text of the fine addresses by Dr. P.M. Joshi and Dr. G.M. Moraes was not available, while the paper of Dr. (Mrs.) A.J. Syed, which was more in the nature of a case-study, had already appeared in *Indica*. The report on the colloquium on "The Future of Historical Research in India" is rather brief, but it is followed by a summary of the principal comments.

The Heras Institute is grateful to the participants in the 1976 meetings for their valuable and the ready collaboration, and to the Indian Council of Historical Research for its generous assistance.

The Heras Institute of  
Indian History and Culture  
St. Xavier's College  
Bombay 400 001  
15 March 1979.

JOHN CORREIA-AFONSO, S.J.  
*Director*





I

THE GUIDANCE OF  
HISTORICAL RESEARCH



# 1

## Inaugural Address

T. K. TOPE

Vice-Chancellor, University of Bombay

I am grateful to Fr. J. Velinkar, the Director, Heras Institute, and Fr. J. Correia-Afonso, the Associate Director, for inviting me to inaugurate the Seminar on the guidance of Historical Research. The Institute established to commemorate the association of Fr. Henry Heras with the St. Xavier's College, Bombay, has been doing substantial work in the area of historical research during the last few years. I had the privilege of listening to Fr. Heras in my college days. I used to attend my post-graduate classes in Sanskrit in St. Xavier's College. Though Ancient Indian History was not my subject, I sometimes walked into the classroom of Fr. Heras with a view to learning something about the Indus Valley Civilization. Fr. Heras appeared to me as one of the ancient *rishis*. His contribution to the University of Bombay and to St. Xavier's College through historical research has been appreciated all over the country. I am happy to know that the valuable library collected by him consists of some 20,000 volumes, and that the Institute has a museum which consists of more than 4,000 antiquities comprising pieces of ancient sculpture, bronzes, paintings, copper plates, Mohenjo-daro seals, several rare manuscripts, and brass Vaishnava, Saiva and Jain icons. I am also happy to know that the authorities of the Institute have planned for the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Institute and have prepared an ambitious programme of academic activities to be undertaken in this connection. May I wish them Godspeed and great success.

I have been a student of law, but I also took interest in history. Historical research in Maharashtra owes its origin to the disinterested and dedicated work of scholars like Itihasacharya Rajwade and others. They had to face many difficulties because they had to start from scratch. Their first task was to collect original sources

for historical research. Those of us who have read the lives of these savants know the ordeals they had to go through. For them historical research was research of the original documents and afterwards the publication of these for the benefit of scholars. I do not think that the task of getting original documents and publishing them is still completely achieved. Historical research both in the universities and outside the universities has to take into account this unfinished task. As a matter of fact, I would suggest that historians in Bombay University should prepare a plan for the publication of such original sources, and the students working for doctorate degrees should be asked to undertake a research project of publishing an (unpublished!) document of historical importance, rather than select a topic for which ready-made material is available in a few published works. I hope you will discuss this suggestion in the seminar.

Another point that strikes me in connection with historical research is the need of mastering, or at least knowing, the language and the script in which the original documents are found. I presume that for students carrying on research in Maratha History it is essential to know the Persian language along with the Marathi language and the Modi script. Do we make it obligatory for them to learn these languages and scripts? Does the programme for historical research outlined by University Departments include a preparatory course on these languages and the script? Similarly, students working on Ancient Indian History must know Sanskrit, Ardhamagadhi or Pali, as the work may need. A student working on topics related to either the early history of Bombay or the history of Goa must know the Portuguese language. I understand that when the first batch of English laws were brought by the British to Surat, these laws were first translated into Portuguese and then into Marathi in Bombay for making them applicable here. Unless a student knows the language as well as the script of the original sources, his research publication will lack the value which it should have. In this regard, the tireless and dedicated work of Fr. Heras deserves to be remembered by everyone who has taken some interest in the study of the Indus Valley Civilization. As the scholars working in the Bharat Itihas Samshodhan Mandal at Pune always kept the ideal of Itihasacharya Rajwade before them regarding the importance of original documents, similarly I do hope scholars working in the Heras Institute in particular will remember the

importance of original sources and prepare themselves accordingly.

Any research publication based on material which may be termed secondary evidence may not be real research, though the scholar may have followed all the rules of the research technique. Of course, I do not propose to lay down that evidence required to prove a fact in history must stand the test of proof in law-courts. That would be practically impossible in many cases. However, it is necessary for a research scholar to weigh the evidence, and decide the probative value of the evidence before coming to a conclusion. This caution is particularly essential in deciding the genuineness or otherwise of documents on which the scholar seeks to rely for his research. I presume all such topics will find a place in discussion on methodology for historical research. Reliance on secondary evidence sometimes creates confusion rather than solves the problem. It is the experience of people connected with law-courts that sometimes a reference to the original section in the statute solves the problem when, after having attempted to read all decided cases on the section and heard arguments, no help is available. There is one difficulty about the original sources. These documents, though written by contemporary authors, were ultimately written by human beings. They had their own likes and dislikes, prejudices, etc., about contemporary personalities. These get reflected in their writings with the result that blind reliance on these sources is bound to lead a student to conclusions which may not be consistent with facts. What methodology is to be adopted in such cases?—This will also be an important aspect of discussion, I hope!

An editor of a historical document has to be very, very careful. I do not propose to refer to all the rules to be observed in this regard. I would, however refer to one or two examples where even eminent editors have erred. The much used edition of John Locke's *The Treatises of Government* was printed from an early edition which left out paragraph 21 in the second treatise. Therefore, the editor enumerated paragraph 22 as 21, and thus, numbered each paragraph one short of what it was in the original.

When he came to 35 he thought it desirable to get into step again. Hence without bothering to know what had happened at paragraph 21, he cut 35 into two at an arbitrary point, left out an "and" and numbered the second half '36.' Being a historian, he 'cut the Gordian knot' in this way. Which means that all references from other editions to any paragraph between 20 to 36 will be misleading!

A good example of bad editing is the two collections of published letters, one from the papers of Sir Robert Peel and the other from those Sir James Graham edited by C.S. Parker. Parker had left out important passages from the letters without giving any sign that he had done so. He had also taken one part of the letter and put it somewhere else only because he thought that in this way the letter made better sense. One more example and I turn to another point. Cardinal Gasquet edited the letters of Lord Acton. These letters were compared by Dom Aelred Watkin and Professor Butterfield with the letters which are at Downside Abbey. The results were astonishing. Nearly 200 letters were found to be omitted. Different letters were fused into one. Even words had been altered.<sup>1</sup>

A scholar dedicated to research in history has to be a student of other social sciences and of literature. As it is impossible to appreciate literature unless one knows the cultural background of the work and contemporary history, so also it is difficult to be successful in research in history unless one has adequate knowledge of contemporary society. Lord Acton rightly observed that:

“History is not only a particular branch of knowledge, but a particular mode and method of knowledge in other branches.”

What is the relation of methodology of research to philosophies of history? A philosophy of history is the personal interpretation and judgement of the individual who is formulating it. Various philosophies of history have been suggested. I will only enumerate some of them: (1) the cyclical, (2) the providential, (3) the progress view. Besides these views, many thinkers have expressed their opinion about the basic idea of history. There is also another problem of historiography which a research student has to remember. Historiography is the study of various approaches to historical method, the actual writing of history and primarily the various interpretations of historical events. Historiography is the study of the techniques employed by the individual historian. It is not necessary to study historiography. For historiography is concerned mainly with what has been written about historical events—the various schools of thought and interpretation centred around any particular historical occurrence—not with the source materials from which the historical fact was derived. “The primary sources of historiography are the

<sup>1</sup>cf. G. Kitson Clark, *The Critical Historian*, London, 1967, pp. 116-18.

works of historians.”<sup>1</sup> I understand from this point of view there is American historiography and there is European historiography. Thus, if a subjective approach is to be adopted in the study and research of history, does it mean that history ceases to be a record of facts and becomes a tool in the hands of scholars to support a particular ideology? If study of history finds a place in our life for this purpose, the entire approach to methodology in history may have to be different from the traditional one. I presume in such cases the scholar might start with a conclusion and try his best to find material to support his conclusion and interpret the material in such a way as to ensure that his conclusions are supported. He might also argue that this is the correct methodology. Thus, there appear to be two schools of historical research. The academic school of historical research dedicated to ‘pure research’ and the new school which looks to the study of history from an ideological point of view. The objection to the ‘pure research’ school is based on its social irrelevance, while criticism of the new school is based on the possibility of the history being used for political propaganda. Which is to be accepted? If we turn to history for an answer, it can be only one. History teaches us that there has never been one permanent ideology which has solved the problems of man. A human being is endowed with intelligence. He has not remained static. He has been changing since the days of Adam and Eve. Hence the question arises whether the problems in the life of such a human being can be solved or understood by any definite and permanent ideology. The eternal truth of history is that history does not repeat itself.

Finally, I would like to refer to research in the universities. There has been a considerable argument in the academic world about fundamental research and applied research. I do not know whether the distinction exists in the area of history. However, I would like you to consider this aspect of research also. A research programme as far as the Ph.D. degree is concerned in our universities has been taken from its prototype that was prevalent in Britain in the earlier part of the century. In Britain, a considerable improvement has been introduced, as regards such research programmes. We have not done anything in this respect. I may mention that a committee of the Royal Society has pointed out some serious defects in the

<sup>1</sup>Donald V. Gawronski, *History, Meaning and Method*, Glenview, 1975, p. 59.



system in their country. According to the report of the committee, theses submitted under a supervisor were often merely a rehash of his own Ph.D. thesis. Another defect pointed out is that too much emphasis in the research programme was given to mere confirmation or otherwise of the ideas of the supervisor rather than to the training of the mind of the students. I would like you to consider to what extent these defects exist in our Ph.D programme. Another relevant aspect is the desirability of having problem-oriented research rather than theoretical research or library research as it is otherwise called. In the area of Sociology, there is field work. Similarly, it is for teachers of other social sciences to consider the possibility of introducing field work research, and this is possible only when our research programme is problem-oriented. I may mention here that it would be desirable to have in the area of law a research programme based on considerations of the impact of social legislation and the need to amend statutes accordingly. All these activities would mean willingness on the part of the teacher to work hard. A teacher in general and the research scholar in particular would be successful in his own task only if he remembers what Rabindranath Tagore has rightly observed "A teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame." Thank you.

## The Selection of Research Students

A. CHERIAN

Professor of History, Wilson College, Bombay

### *Introduction*

“History leads to understanding and wisdom. It is a road beset with pitfalls for the untutored and unwary, but the vistas expand as you journey upward and at the end a treasure house awaits if you have the necessary keys” (Wood Gray).

With his faithful co-workers, the archivist and the librarian, the historian spends much of his time searching for new evidence and making it freely available for study. We shall not face up to our problems as historians unless we clearly apprehend that history is a special type of discipline, and that its utility must be measured in other ways than those applied to science, or even to economics or the arts. No other subject, except possibly philosophy, embraces the whole story of man. While, in the nature of the case, the historian must confine his special research to a restricted area, he is at all times under a special compulsion to see life whole. If he is equal to the demands of his high calling, he must, as he studies the past, relate one area of activity to another: for example, the history of foreign policy to the history of ideas, the history of business cycles to the movements of politics, the story of religion to the cultural media in which it finds expression. If he becomes too narrow a specialist, he misses some of the fundamental values of his profession. In the second place, it is to be remembered and emphasized that most historians are teachers: this is not to say that training in history does not offer opportunities for employment in other fields.

We must also clearly recognize that in history, more than in most disciplines, the teacher must transcend his materials. The facts of history can be dead until they are put to use. The data of history can be well-nigh meaningless until thoroughly interpreted, the teaching of history will be effective in so far as it communicates, not

facts alone, but the wisdom, experience, and insight that lie behind the facts.

*The Essential Pre-conditions for Training in History*

There is a great advantage in catching the prospective historian early. If we take an intense personal interest in the brightest of our undergraduates, we shall be able to help them in very practical ways to mould their careers towards the doctorate. If we have some contacts with them by the time they begin to concentrate, we shall be able to see to it, for example, that they start their language preparation. To take another example, any historian needs some training in economics. If we know about these recruits for our discipline in time, we can see that they receive such training. We can see, too, that they start with some broad conceptions of history, and some wide knowledge, and do not undertake our discipline with the idea that they can operate only in a restricted area in time, space and spirit.

The prospective research student should become familiar with the classics of historical writing. It will be found, almost invariably, that these classics illustrate the primary values of historical study, that they deal with large subjects, not small ones, that they are remarkable for their insight, not merely for the accumulation of the data, that they bear the stamp of the author's personality, and have colour and form. It will also be found that they have literary quality.

It would be helpful if every student had a course in the philosophy of history. There is, of course, no philosophy of history that has eternal validity or that commands universal assent. The value of the study of this field lies in the invitation it offers to audacity, a virtue not much practised in our profession. We need to play with large ideas from time to time, not because such diversion is a means to absolute truth, but because it is invigorating and stimulating. In seeking the definitive, we often overlook the value of the unproven thesis, the incompletely substantiated theory, in exciting thought and spurring to research.

The aspiring researcher must first make sure that he has a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of the historical background of his subject. It is not a waste of time to read secondary sources; it is better to spend some time in this way than to go on with detailed research at the beginning; it is necessary for a student to have a complete grasp of Indian history before plunging into research. For those who have studied history of India at the B.A.

and M.A. levels, the above observation might appear to be superficial. But it is absolutely necessary even for such students to read in detail all the available secondary authorities for the period in which they want to specialize. The study of ordinary text-books and other secondary authorities is essential in the case of students who have taken their Master's degree in an allied discipline (e.g. sociology, economics etc.) and not in history.

In addition to this more general knowledge which is desired, a particular subject may very well make it necessary that the student should acquire some particular specialised knowledge as well. For instance, he may have to learn something of contemporary law and the procedure of certain courts, or he may have to learn the meaning of the technical terms of some organization, or the methods of some trade or industry. Where this is so, it will be necessary that the student should learn what he has to know accurately. Particularly, he should know the true meaning of all the words he uses. Researchers have been betrayed into the most surprising mistakes because they have failed to do this.

Obviously, the student must know well the language in which the documents he will use are likely to be expressed. He must be able to read easily and correctly the script (hand-writing) in which they are likely to have been written, and he must know the conventional forms into which some of his evidence may be cast, and something of the practice those forms may embody. For instance, if one is dealing with official documents, produced for a government department, a court or a parliament, the researcher ought to know something of the authority which caused them to be produced and its procedure, for what purpose they were produced, what information they are likely to give and what they will omit. He must know what conventional form a particular type of document is likely to assume at a particular period so that he may be able to determine the date of an undated document, or perhaps reject it as spurious if the form is anachronistic.

#### *Qualities Needed in a Research Student*

The quality most demanded in a doctoral candidate is "research skill and zeal." This is mentioned as a top quality twice as often as any other. "Interest in teaching" and "general intellectual curiosity" tie as the second most desired qualities, and these are closely followed by "skill in teaching."

Most of the Indian universities have prescribed a minimum period of three years for graduates and two years for post-graduates to complete the Ph.D. thesis. In doctoral studies, evidence of qualitative as opposed to quantitative scholarship is considered the goal, and the quantitative efforts only as means towards the desired end.

The basic intellectual dilemma now involved in planning units of study for doctoral candidates was well stated in the early nineteenth century by Leopold von Ranke: "to understand universal history one must first know the specific events of history; but to know the specific one must first understand the universal." The accumulation of knowledge since Ranke's time has made the problem enormously more difficult than it was in his day. One cannot master all of history. Deciding how much mastery Ph.D. candidates should demonstrate is complicated by practical considerations:

(a) The able Ph.D. candidate should earn the doctorate in not more than four years of full-time study.

(b) As a potential research scholar and teacher of advanced college students, he needs depth—the mastery of facts and materials in a specialized field of history. The units of historical study must be relatively small if this mastery is to be achieved.

(c) As a citizen and as a teacher giving instruction in broad survey courses—and also as a scholar doing research and writing—the Ph.D. candidate needs breadth. This can be achieved most readily in the study of broad units of history.

The units of study in doctoral programmes are usually termed "fields." Some universities in India require Ph.D. candidates to show some degree of mastery in three to four fields of history, each broadly defined. Many universities, unwilling to accept the superficial acquaintance with "fields" so broadly defined, divide history into several relatively small units of study. The divisions sometimes are topical or geographical or chronological. Through the study of several relatively small fields in differing cultural areas and different periods of time, it is hoped that the Ph.D. candidate will acquire a sense of the universal in history. At the same time he is able to achieve considerable mastery in the field of his specialisation, which is also restricted in size.

### *Forms of Study*

The programme of study for the Ph.D. in history typically must involve a combination of different types of instruction. The primary

requirement is an introductory "Course in Methodology," or research seminars. In these the student becomes acquainted with the tools and techniques of critical historical research and develops his capacity for writing history. One or more courses in historiography or the philosophies in history provide an awareness of the development, theories, potentialities, and limits of historical scholarship. A course in historiography or philosophies of history should be required of all research students. The guiding teacher may then introduce the student to the standard bibliographies and give the student reading material. A great amount of independent reading is required of the research student.

The guiding teacher is allowed "not more than 10 students" in Indian universities. However, large numbers of students and limited number of teachers cause frequent exceptions to be made. In an ideal situation, the guiding teacher is provocative, demanding, critical and encouraging. He is himself engaged in research and is informed about the history of the period and the topic of research. Introducing students to the bibliographical aids, key sources, and major repositories of his field, the guiding teacher somehow manages to convey to the students the intellectual challenge and excitement that he himself finds in his work. Before the student is finally permitted to register, the guiding teacher is to impress upon the student the comprehensiveness of research. Critical use of evidence, logical inferences, technical competence and literary style—these are to be evaluated and improved.

The success of a research work depends upon the students as well as upon the professor (guiding teacher). The qualities needed in students are enviable ones. Among them are superior intelligence; vigorous interest in the subject area; imaginative, inventive turn of mind, tempered by critical faculties; initiative in finding sources and facts; courage to make decision coupled with caution against making them prematurely and without necessary qualifications; systematic habits in organising research and collecting data; competence in the use of languages where the source materials are available; and ability to write lucid and vigorous prose concisely and in a well organised pattern. All these qualities are needed as the research project is developed and the thesis is prepared. Ability to perceive and accept criticism, and sufficient resilience to capitalize upon self-illusion—these additional qualities are useful when the students' paper is exposed to criticism.

These qualities in guide and students can make research work one of the most rewarding of all educational experiences, an apprenticeship that forms the very core of the education of the historian. In research, the students come to know the excitement as well as the drudgery of scholarly work, the fun as well as the effort of historical writing. But too many or inadequate students, and a slow-witted or uninterested professor, can make the experience a dreary travesty of scholarship.

A prospective research scholar must receive "directed reading courses" from the guiding teacher. Most Ph.D. candidates do much reading, and as such the doctoral dissertation is considered as the most valuable phase of training for college teaching. It is a debatable point whether the dissertation should be a part of the training of college teachers in all faculties. A paper on Methodology and another paper on that particular period of Indian History to which the thesis belongs must be insisted upon before the student is finally permitted to register. It is also desirable that special thesis-writing seminars be organised by the universities.

It is suggested that before a student is permitted to register for the Ph.D., a series of formal examinations may be held and final sanction for registration be based on the performance therein:

(a) Language Examinations: Language or languages in which source materials are available, if the student did not offer these languages at the Matriculation level. Proficiency to read these languages should be considered adequate.

(b) General Examination: The examinations, written and oral alike, test the candidate's knowledge and understanding of fields of history. Both written and oral tests usually seek to ascertain bibliographical as well as factual knowledge.

(c) Special problems in India: There is an increasing awareness in India today of the place of historical research in the scheme of education as well as an aid to administration. Since Independence, sources of information have also been finding an outlet, and the governmental archives have been organised and opened for use by scholars.

To be eligible for Ph.D. research, the Master's degree, normally, is the minimum qualification. Normally an M.A. registers himself for the higher degree immediately after taking his degree, but in many cases teachers, or even some others, may do so after the lapse of some years. It is not uncommon to insist on a higher division or

some research experience for registration, but generally one meets with fresh graduates—often of poorest quality—struggling to find their way through the intricacies of research, often left to their own resources.

That the better type of students is not generally drawn to history is partly due to the glamour of applied sciences and the greater scope of employment afforded to students offering other subjects in the humanities. This tendency can be arrested, and it is suggested that other things being equal, candidates well-grounded in history should be given a preference in administrative and secretarial services.

It is very important to have the proper type of research students. There can be two categories of research workers—research students and research fellows, the former mostly younger pupils who have just finished their M.A. course, and the latter, either those who have already taken a preliminary research degree like the M.Litt. or B. Litt., or teachers of some experience who turn to research. Generally speaking, there is more to be said in favour of encouraging researchers of the latter category, because presumably they have a better grounding in history and have a better chance of bringing to bear a critical outlook on their researches.

### *Suggestions*

(a) The selection of suitable candidates is of supreme importance. Normally, the merit of the candidate as revealed by the previous educational career can be the basis of selection. But it is not always a sure criterion.

(b) For the fresh researcher a condition of his aptitude and sufficient background knowledge of the subject should be insisted upon before enrolment. It will be more desirable that the Research Institutions may admit a student and for a year or more, as necessary, may give him guidance in respect of general reading, deep study of the field and allied subjects, before assigning the problem of research. A course in methodology, historical writing, etc. must also be given to him.

(c) It is very desirable to observe the rule of keeping the potential research-scholars for one or two years on the waiting list before getting them registered by the university, but making them work during the period of their waiting by allotting to them subjects, giving each of them a tentative synopsis and a list of source-books or manuscripts that he or she might have to study. This practice is



found to be very salutary. Most of them, who are not very serious scholars, get tired and leave, and only genuine workers remain and they are then registered in the university.

(d) The guiding teacher should be appointed by the university and not chosen by the candidate as is the practice at present. There should be a board or committee of advisers for each candidate. The advisers should possess knowledge of the sources, in the original. They need not all be history men and may be professors or readers of Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Portuguese, French, etc., but devoted scholars of wide interest and sympathy. The candidates should have free access to them and derive benefit from their learning and experience.

(e) Prospective research students must possess the necessary linguistic equipment, such as a good working knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, Medieval Marathi, Portuguese or French, according to the requirements of the subject selected for research. Many research scholars today depend upon English translations of Persian chronicles. But there are few English translations of Marathi documents. The research scholars have, therefore, to work on imperfect source-material.

(f) A selection by the guiding teacher assisted by other experts may prove helpful. Sectarian considerations and personal applications should find no place in the selection of suitable candidates. In addition to the previous academic record, special equipments, particularly knowledge of languages, should be taken into account.

(g) Allied disciplines: Subjects like economics, political science, regional languages, etc., could be offered by the prospective research students at the B.A. and M.A. levels.

(h) In order that maximum benefit be derived by the student, universities may grant recognition to teachers for special periods of Indian History only. There have been instances where an indifferent scholar of Medieval Indian History had taken up guidance for Ancient and Modern Indian History, for the particular university did not have any other person to take charge of research guidance.

(i) In most of the Indian universities there is a standing rule that the research students must reside within the territorial jurisdiction of the particular university. In special cases, this rule could be waived in the interest of historical scholarship. For example, if a promising student from Bombay would like to carry out research in Ancient Indian History at the Benares Hindu University, such permission might be granted.

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## The Choice of Topics

A.R. KULKARNI

Professor and Head, Department of History  
University of Poona

The choice of a topic for a doctoral thesis is the most crucial part of the entire process of research. A Ph. D. dissertation is supposed to be a joint product of the supervisor and his pupil. The problem is who should do the selection of the research topic: the pupil or the supervisor? As no set theories can be formulated in this respect, I shall confine my discussion to my personal experiences of the past few years.

When a young scholar, who has just completed his post-graduate studies, approaches you for research, obviously you will ask him what prompted him to do research. In most of the cases you get vague answers as the researcher is not sure either of the subject or of his abilities. For those who do not get jobs immediately after their post-graduation, or in the case of ladies who are not anxious to get married soon, research becomes a stop-gap arrangement. They would necessarily first ask you whether there is any stipend or fellowship for research in your department.

Research is supposed to aim at advancement of knowledge. A scholar, as a result of his research, can bring out new information based on fresh material, or give new interpretation to the existing material, which might remove prejudices and thereby develop a healthier and scientific approach towards the past. When the object of your research is to make some valuable contribution to knowledge, the subject of your research must be your own, arising out of your own study. You must realize spontaneously the necessity of conducting further research on the topic you have in mind.

One should not expect that the supervisor have a store of topics, and that as soon as you approach him, he open his box like a jeweller and ask you to make a choice. We hear of stories, perhaps

baseless, of professional supervisors who not only give topics, but also write out the thesis provided the clients pay the price of their academic services.

If a student looks at his Ph.D. work purely from the mercenary point of view, it is better not to undertake it at all. He may succeed in getting the coveted degree, which might serve his immediate purpose, but it would not lead to advancement of knowledge. He will work mechanically on a topic suggested to him, and his research career will come to an end with the acquisition of the degree. If the scholar is not emotionally and intellectually involved in the topic of his research, he will be wasting his own and another's time, by producing something trashy.

The task of historical research is to discover the foundations of historical truth. By historical research I mean an intensive study of a specific region and of a specific period. If the time and space of enquiry are not limited or clearly defined, the study tends to be a general survey. However, it must be remembered that the scope of the subject should not be so narrow as to prevent any substantial or significant contribution to knowledge.

Let us now examine these two possibilities: the student choosing his own topic and the supervisor suggesting one to him.

When a student selects his own topic, naturally he thinks it is important and that he alone can find a satisfactory answer to its problem. However, experienced guides have pointed to some dangers involved in this process. First, it is likely that the problem proposed for investigation is not a real problem. This realization comes after one has spent a considerable amount of time and energy on it. One realizes that the hypothesis was wrong. Secondly, the problem may exist, but one does not have any definite evidence on which to base one's conclusion. Or it is likely that there is only one little bit of evidence which is hard to come by, difficult to interpret, or cannot be used, the student. Under such circumstances, it is very likely that one may get frustrated and drop the idea of research altogether. One may drop the topic that has turned out to be worthless, but one need not stop one's research activity. The best solution lies in starting research on some new topic.

To begin with, the candidate may select a broad front or a general topic and then narrow it down in the course of his research and focus his attention on certain specific points which he thinks worth pursuing. Or he can first make a general survey of his subject

with the formulation of particular questions of enquiry, and then start probing deeper into the subject. As one advances in the research, one has to abandon some of the materials and earlier conclusions, and switch over to an altogether different approach.

For instance, a few years back I started collecting material with a view to presenting the social and economic conditions of life in "Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji." But later I realized that some of the material I collected for social history could also be fruitfully utilized for economic history. I therefore narrowed down my topic and concentrated only on the conditions of economic life and produced a sizeable work. I can cite an example in this respect. Nobody can deny that religious life forms a part of social life, but I tried to view it from the economic angle. I considered religious life under "public expenditure" and classified the state expenditure on various religious and charitable activities, and thus indirectly described the religious life of the people.

As soon as a topic is selected, one must decide what are the most important problems to be investigated. The results should be dictated by the evidence. Similarly, one should not impose one's own views on the evidence that one is handling, i.e., should not twist the evidence to suit one's purpose.

Before starting to work on the topic, one should ascertain if anybody has worked or is working on it. One could do this by consulting certain check-lists on research already done and research in progress. Universities and recognized research institutions are usually the main centres of research in India. The student should, therefore, collect information from these centres about research in his field. The National Archives of India publishes a *Bulletin of Research Theses and Dissertations done in History in various Indian universities*. The Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics under its project of "Bibliography of Economic History of India," prepared a check-list of theses submitted to Indian universities, and it is now published as a supplement to the journal *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (1973). The Inter-University Board of India has also published a *Bibliography of Dissertations in the Social Sciences*. B.C. Bloomfield has compiled the titles of all the theses accepted by the universities in the United Kingdom and Ireland between 1877-1964 in a book *Theses of South Asia*.

The annual reports of several State Archives and research societies mention the names of scholars who visited their archives during

the year of report, and the topics of their research. This information can be very useful in order to know the nature of research activity going around. The Institute of Historical Studies has also published several lists of theses accepted by different Universities. One could also get this information in book-review sections of various journals.

From these sources one can know whether anybody else has researched that topic. One need not despair if one discovers that somebody has already worked on the topic, for it is very likely that one's approach and source material are different. Again, one cannot always rely entirely on the lists about work in progress, because many people either give up research or change their topic in the course of time. In case another scholar is working on a similar topic, the best way is to correspond with him and to know his line of thinking. As no scholar holds monopoly rights on any historical subject whatsoever, one has every right to pursue research on the same topic, from another angle, if one has made a good deal of progress in one's work. However, all cut-throat competition in historical research is to be avoided.

Once the topic of research is fixed, the next task is to decide what are the most important problems to be investigated. It takes a lot of time to understand the nature and scope of the subject. One is likely to get bored during this period of probation, the most uncomfortable period in the life of a research scholar. But tenacity and patience ultimately pay.

After deciding the nature and scope of the subject, one starts collecting the material or data one requires to develop the main theme. Some research scholars take delight only in collecting material, just as some people love reading for the sake of reading. Such a person will never become a research scholar, he would make a good philatelist. You must fix your theme as early as you can, and produce a thesis which will be a fine piece of work.

While defining the subject matter, one may need the help of the guide. This may require a year or so to explore the subject, which would enable one to write a general account of the work. This may include the sources one proposes to consult, the secondary books that are to be read to prepare the background, a rough bibliography relating to the topic, the issues involved in the subject and the method to be adopted to tackle them. The discussion with the guide may lead to some modifications or alterations in the plan of

research. As one proceeds, one may realize that he cannot stick to the original plan. Changing the title of the subject may be necessary. There is no harm in making all these changes and modifications in the interest of sound historical research, for rigidity is always harmful to progress.

It is my experience that a student who comes with his own subject of research does more justice to his research than others. Since his subject arises out of his own study, he does not feel research a dead weight on his mind. He is curious to know more about his subject of research. He collects his data with great clarity and finishes his research within the stipulated time. One student working in the department of Archaeology developed some interest in the Maratha forts, and when I casually suggested to him that he pursue it, he produced a good thesis in three years. Another student found on his own the foreign relations of the Adil Shahi Kingdom more interesting, and completed his research on it within the prescribed period, and got it published as well. He was deeply involved in every stage of research from the selection of the topic to its presentation to the scholarly world. Another student working in a university library took interest in the history of the library movement in Maharashtra and is about to submit his findings. Thus, if the guide can draw students from social cross-sections, he gets good results in a shorter time. He has less work. He has only to look through the research work from the point of view of its methodology or of the presentation of the subject matter in a proper form.

Let us now consider the other alternative of topic selection, namely, the guide suggesting the topic. Some guides visualize a broad theme and get it worked out with the help of a band of research students. If the student agrees he can work within the scheme on any aspect of the broad topic suggested. In such a case the guide has to shoulder the entire responsibility. A student, who accepts such a problem and later finds it difficult to pursue or produce results acceptable to his guide, blames the guide for involving him in the scheme. I know a senior scholar who intended studying the social conditions of the Puranic period of Indian history. He proposed to study each Purana with the help of a research student desirous of a doctoral degree. However, he could rope in only one student for his scheme within the last thirty years or so. The labour involved in reading various critical editions of the Puranas was excessive for students who had no genuine interest in Sanskrit.

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I once thought of preparing a socio-economic history of Maharashtra with the help of students interested in Maratha history. This general theme can be divided period-wise or subject-wise into several topics for intensive study and a comprehensive social history of Maharashtra will emerge. I have done some research on the socio-economic history of the Shivaji period of Maratha history. "Maharashtra under the Company (1818-1857)," a thesis prepared under this scheme, presents the picture of the transitional period of the history of Maharashtra. The same period was investigated by another student from the point of view of the activities of the missionaries, and their impact on Maratha society. Since the work of settlement of the territories conquered from the Marathas was accomplished by a few civil-cum-military servants of the Company like Mountstuart Elphinstone, Grant Duff, etc., a few students are analysing the pioneering work done by Elphinstone, Briggs, and others during this period of transition.

The socio-economic history of eighteenth century Maharashtra still remains unexplored. The pre-Panipat and the post-Panipat periods of Maratha history could be studied independently. Elphinstone created the State of Satara in 1818, and it was merged into the Company's territory in 1848. The story of Satara thus forms a complete unit for research. I am looking forward to students who may undertake such studies of Maharashtra.

The guide may have some floating ideas about some topics which he can throw to the young scholars for consideration. If a student catches the point, he may produce wonderful results. I have had some good surprises in this respect. If the guide could assess the latent qualities of his students, such experiments could be made with some success. Of course, one requires receptive and hard-working students.

The Historical Records Commission has in one of its sessions resolved that critically edited and annotated collections of source material be considered for granting doctoral degrees. When the resolution was circulated among the universities for comments, most of them did not subscribe to this view. Those who have some experience of critically editing source material will alone realize the amount of labour and scholarship involved in it. The study of sources requires a full understanding of the political, social and economic background of the region. The linguistic equipment for it must be sound. The editor has to write a critical introduction to



the selection which may reveal his understanding of the subject. I, therefore, consider the editing of source material from family or state archives equivalent to a thesis for a doctoral degree in history. I can cite one good example in this respect. Chapekar critically examined the family account papers of the Chiplunkars, the Khasgiwales, the Tulsibagwales, etc., and presented a picture of economic life in eighteenth-century Maharashtra in the erudite introduction of his book *Peshwaichya Sawalit*. Such an effort deserves more than a doctoral degree of any university.

Socio-economic history has become the craze of the day. One should not, however, forget that such studies may be made in the context of the political changes of the period in question. Scholars have not as yet taken seriously to the study of urban or village communities. The Alienation Office, Poona, contains eighteenth-century revenue records of hundreds of villages. The study of these village records, I believe, could alone enable a research scholar to present an accurate and reliable picture of village communities. If a diligent scholar selected a particular village and studied its records in the chronological order, he would know the growth or decline of village communities. The main purpose of historical research is to show the change—for better or for worse—in a society over a span of time, and this could be best realized by studying the revenue accounts and the family archives of that village.

The majority of research students are interested in political history, particularly in the study of certain historical personalities. Such studies are by nature descriptive. As far as Maratha history is concerned, I think this field has been fairly exhausted, but still I find students coming to me with such topics as Tarabai, Balaji Vishwanath, Bajirao II, etc. Of course, there is no harm if a student pursues an old topic on which research has already been done, provided he discovers new material for it. For instance, one of my students is working on the First Anglo-Maratha War, a topic which has been discussed threadbare by eminent historians. But his claim is that he is using for the first time original and unpublished Marathi records which were either unknown to the earlier scholars, or were not consulted by them. Such a study is bound to advance knowledge.

It is difficult to work out thematic topics as this involves a lot of analysis and patience. I would very much appreciate any one

working on such topics as 'The Maratha Confederacy, its Rise and Fall,' 'The Southern Maratha Jagirdars,' 'Evaluation of the Work of Maratha Vakils in the Mughal Court,' 'Maratha Historiography,' 'The Land Revenue System under the Marathas,' 'The Revenue Administration in the Maratha Country in the British Period,' etc.

While selecting a certain topic for research a student should first examine his equipment for it. He should know whether he is qualified to do research on it. He should have thorough and comprehensive knowledge of the historical background of his subject. In this respect he should know mainly two things: (1) The various archival centres where the chief collections of sources are available. Those who are working on Marathi sources will find useful information in Dr. V.G. Khobrekar's book on the Archives in Maharashtra. The Cambridge University Press has published a comprehensive guide to National and State Archives in Ceylon, India and Pakistan entitled *Government Archives in South Asia*; (2) The works already published or in MS form on the topic related to his subject. For him, these will be secondary authorities, but a critical assessment of all these earlier works on the subject is an important step in the process of his own research. He should collect information on the following points about these earlier works: (a) What was the purpose of the work. (b) What were the sources consulted by the scholar. (c) The period of the work. (d) The bibliography of the work. This information enables one to gauge what new knowledge could be added to the existing. There should be a critical assessment of these works, but at the same time it should not indulge in attacking one's predecessors or even one's contemporaries. This may satisfy one's vanity, but will serve no useful purpose.

The scholar should also acquire specialized knowledge essential for his study. For instance, if he is working on economic history, he should know the basic principles of economic theory, the history of economic ideas, as well as the tools used by economists. A social historian needs knowledge of the functioning of the society, technical terms and the contexts in which they are used, language and its usage, calligraphy, contemporary practice of writing, e.g. the use of abbreviations in Marathi, etc. Students writing on social and economic history should get themselves acquainted with other branches of social science like sociology, anthropology, economics, politics, etc. A greater inter-disciplinary communication, consultation

and co-operation would be very useful for achieving perfection in research.

Thus, in conclusion, I might say that if the student accepts a theme from the teacher willingly, it is obligatory on his part to work out his research project to the entire satisfaction of his supervisor. But the ideal in research will always be that the student select his own topic of research. He would then take more interest in the research, and work out the theme to his entire satisfaction.

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## Observations on the Guidance of Research

K.S. LAL

Professor and Head, Department of History  
University of Jodhpur

After the selection of a research student, and the choice of the topic for research (for the degree of Ph.D.), the work of actual guidance of research begins. It is well known that perhaps in no other discipline in the Humanities and Social Sciences (like Political Science or Economics or Sociology) has so much research been done in India as in the field of History. This is due to the fact that ours is a vast land in which source materials in many languages are available from one end of the country to the other, and in spite of ravages of climate and time much of this material is still preserved. Indian scholars have also given great attention to and taken great pains over historical research, with the result that there is an abundance of modern historical literature of merit available. This is a matter for satisfaction. But this has also raised the standard of historical research. In history, theses of the highest standard alone are apt to be selected for the award of a doctoral degree.

This has to be instilled in the mind of the research scholar. This also places a great responsibility on the supervisor in the actual guiding of research. He has to describe the tools of research, make them available to the researcher as far as possible, and then has to guide him in the writing of the narrative till the thesis is completed.

The first problem that needs attention at the very outset is the provision of equipment to the researcher. The importance of acquiring a good knowledge of the language in which source materials on a particular topic are available need hardly be emphasised. But research work is being done in many places without reference to primary sources, because the researcher has no grounding in the concerned language. It is imperative for scholars to fully know the language in which contemporary records are available, be it Marathi,

Rajasthani, Persian, Sanskrit, or Portuguese. A research scholar may be required first to study language at centres which provide advanced instruction in this regard, so that he should be fully equipped for carrying on research. He should also make a special effort to acquire excellence in the language in which he has to write his thesis. But we shall talk about this a little later.

The second problem is with regard to the modern methods of research. Today we have to study history as systematically as possible with the help of charts, diagrams, tables, maps, etc. We also need to know Economics, Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology and other border disciplines and that too up to a high standard. On the face of it all this cannot be done by one man. Therefore, modern research requires team work. Even in Ph.D. theses it may be a good idea to make a joint effort and do things in co-operation, co-ordination and in the form of projects. But in co-operative effort responsibility is divided, and therefore diluted. If a work is assigned jointly to a number of persons, it may never be completed. Therefore, some way has to be found in which excellent work may be produced not by one man alone, because it may be beyond him, but by co-operative effort. This, however, does not apply in the case of a Ph.D. student. He has to undergo apprenticeship in research alone and is individually responsible for completing and presenting his dissertation. While completing his work, however, he should freely take the help of people in sister disciplines.

In some universities the synopsis of the proposed dissertation is appended to the application for enrolment of a Ph.D. scholar. It is taken into consideration at the time of selecting the candidate for registration. In some other universities the synopsis is prepared after the scholar has been enrolled. Only in such a situation has the supervisor to guide the scholar in the preparation of the synopsis and its division into chapters. In this regard, no hard rules can be laid down, because the synopsis will have to be in accordance with the nature of the topic. However, the division into chapters and sub-headings may be so settled as to permit of as much flexibility as possible. This needs to be so because, as the scholar delves deep into his study, he may find that some changes in the synopsis and in the scheme of chapters are very necessary.

The research scholar should be simultaneously made acquainted with the modern techniques and ideas of research, as well as with the latest fashions in the writing of history. In the present times

border disciplines like Sociology and Economics have started infiltrating into historical research. This is both good and bad. Sociology is a new science and is not as precise as History. Using sociological tools for historical research may be good. Sociologists, however, sometimes take for granted a premise which may not hold good for history. Conclusions based on such a premise may not turn out to be correct. Besides, the sociological approach has not been able to stand the test of historical methodology. Sociological jargon has certainly played havoc with historical writings. Similarly, studying history from the economic angle has come to mean the infiltration of Marxism in historical writing. The Marxist interpretation of history and Marx's dialectical materialism may be good if used as a tool of research. But Marxism as an opinion is armed and belligerent, and sometimes intolerant of other approaches or facets.

Thus, good and less good aspects of the sociological and economic approach should be borne in mind by the student. Mathematics also is being freely used in history. That is because many issues which turn crucially on quantitative dimensions are disguised by words. They do not become apparent because they are put forward in words instead of in numbers or equations. Aligarh has taken recourse to both Mathematics and Marxism as tools of research and interpretation and, it cannot be denied, with some amount of success.

The study of demography is also coming into 'fashion' these days. Population studies are popular both in Europe and in India because when we talk of the study of a people, the question arises how many people we are dealing with. Political history today is considered to be traditional, and as a narrative of the public institutions, officials and their competition for power and their decline. On the other hand a new political history is emerging which in effect is a sub-category of social history. As social history is becoming more and more important, telescope is giving way to microscope, and many historians in India and abroad are examining smaller units of society in greater detail. It need hardly be stressed that there is a growing tendency to borrow concepts and techniques from historical archaeology, anthropology, ethno-history and historical geography, and even psycho-history.

The research scholar should be made acquainted with all these new trends in historical writing and be encouraged to browse freely in the library. It will help him form the habit of spending long hours

in the library where his material lies concentrated. It will also help him to select his model. It is a matter of dispute among scholars whether a research scholar should have a model for his research or not. He may not choose Gibbon or Macaulay or Mommsen, for he will not be able to walk along the path laid down by them. Also "a working hypothesis" is considered to be working on "preconceived notions."

But guidance is meant for a novice and not for practising historians and, therefore, if the student selects a model he should be encouraged to work according to it. Similarly, he can choose a working hypothesis, and this working hypothesis should not be considered as pre-conceived notions and biases of his.

Guidance has to be given about the collection, selection and analysis of the source material. It should be repeatedly brought to the notice of the scholar that methodology in history is of greatest importance. Once the material is collected, he has to read and re-read it repeatedly, reflect on it deeply, and so arrive at clear conclusions. This can be done in two ways:

- (1) The scholar studies the basic, primary, contemporary and nearly contemporary sources, compares, collates and analyses them, and writes down his narrative. Then he consults modern works and articles pertaining to his subject, and sees how far his view and conclusions are in agreement or in difference with those of others in the field.
- (2) Or, the scholar studies all the material available on the subject—contemporary as well as modern—and then writes out the narrative. My own experience tells me that the first method is better and one can make a positive contribution to knowledge by going back again and again to the primary sources before his mind is influenced or biased by the writings of modern scholars.

All this while lectures in the department or in the faculty should be organised on the preparation of bibliography, index, and so on. (In some universities training in these is imparted at the M. Phil. stage). If this is not done on the departmental level, the supervisor must do the thing himself individually for every scholar. But the first situation brings the researcher in direct contact with other members of the faculty in connection with his research, and this is very healthy. In fact, he should be encouraged to discuss his subject freely not only with his own supervisor but also with other teachers/

members of inter-disciplinary subjects. This broadens his outlook. There should be no jealousy on the part of the supervisor to keep the scholar under his own exclusive and isolated umbrella.

When the scholar actually starts writing the thesis, he should be told that he is producing literature and not just writing a letter or an essay. He should, therefore, write only after great reflection and at no time be in a hurry. He may not be a creative artist like a poet or an essayist, all the same history is best expressed in literary form. Hence the need not only for getting a good grounding in the languages in which the source material is available, but also in the language in which the thesis is to be written. Today, the study of language and the acquisition of excellence in it are neglected, and the ambition of writing with distinction 'in a style' is no longer there. But a scholar of history cannot ignore embellishing and chiselling the language of his thesis. A tip to the scholar may prove beneficial. Just ten or fifteen minutes before embarking on writing the day's paragraph or page, he may pick up a good book and read through it. This will set his mind on the right lines for good writing. Therefore, he should be prepared for two things. He should not be afraid of writing again and again, he should tear up pages after pages and write and rewrite again and again till he feels himself satisfied that he has been able to convey his thought precisely and effectively. Secondly, there should be no casualness. If a reference has to be given, he should stop immediately, pick out the reference and insert it, rather than go on with his narrative with the feeling that what he is writing is the first draft and the reference can be added later on. He should consider the first draft as the final one and write it with all interest, devotion and sincerity. Corrections and improvements on this draft by the supervisor may alone make the thesis presentable. Indeed the process of correction and introduction of changes and improvements may have to be resorted to by the supervisor a number of times. But the scholar should do his best on his own rather than depend too much on the guide.

In the beginning the supervisor knows more about the subject than the student. He also knows about methodology and can give excellent guidance. After some time the scholar becomes master of that topic, and the supervisor should allow himself to slip into the background. He should not impose his own ideas or opinions on the researcher. The research scholar should feel free to express his own views and conclusions, because these emerge after a long, reflec-



tive, and analytical study.

There has been, in one form or the other, some sort of restraint on writers through the ages. But the guide should not pressurise the researcher to arrive at certain conclusions or to express certain views without his (the scholar's) subscribing to them. Whenever and wherever the state and society have become synonymous, the grip of the government on the mind of the intellectuals has tightened. A fundamental question is: is the historian responsible to the society in which he lives, or is he free to pursue knowledge and truth without restraint and without reference to contemporary society or government? If the historian gives priority to the requirements of contemporary society above the requirements of truth, he will have to give consideration to the dictates of his government, for society and government are closely inter-related, today more than ever before. But if a historian is left with his freedom to pursue truth and knowledge, then Marxist historians will not condemn non-Marxist historians and historians of social life and economic life will not look down upon the historian of government and polity. There need not be any ideological conflict between them either. Ideological conflicts arise from alignment with social groups and political power. The supervisor has no moral or political authority to dictate views or impose ideas on the researcher. The researcher should be left free to choose his line of thought.

## 5

### Report

A seminar on *The Guidance of Historical Research* was held on March 6-7, 1976, by the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, and sponsored by the Indian Council of Historical Research. Research guides of the Bombay University and some scholars tried to pool their thoughts in order to find solutions to the problems connected with research in history. The seminar was inaugurated by the Vice-Chancellor of the Bombay University, Prof. T.K. Tope. Papers were presented on "The Selection of Students" by Dr. A. Cherian, "The Choice of Topics" by Dr. A.R. Kulkarni, "The Actual Guidance of Research" by Dr. (Mrs.) A.J. Syed and "Observations on Archival Research" by Dr. P.M. Joshi. As Dr. K.S. Lal was unavoidably absent, his paper on "Observations on the Guidance of Research" was presented for him by Fr. J. Correia-Afonso. Prof. J.V. Naik and Dr. N.S. Gorekar made studied comments on papers. Dr. M.D. David presented the overview. Dr. G.M. Moraes delivered the concluding address.

In the inaugural address the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. T.K. Tope, raised some pertinent issues, which he expressed through a series of questions. He pointed out that there are in existence two schools of historical research, the academic school which dedicates itself to pure research and the new school which dedicates its research efforts to support a particular ideology. If a particular researcher belongs to the latter school, does his research work cease to be a record of facts? Does it become merely a tool to support a particular ideology? Is there a difference between fundamental research and applied research in the area of history? Is it possible to introduce field-work research and problem-oriented research in the area of history? What are the minimum requirements, laid down by the Bombay University, to ensure that the research scholars have adequate knowledge of the Indian and foreign languages which they come across in the original sources? The Vice-Chancellor asked the seminar to consider these problem-oriented questions.

The members of the seminar agreed with Dr. Cherian that the M.A. should be a minimum qualification for registration for the Ph.D. Some research guides had the experience that occasionally students who had secured a first class at the M.A. found it difficult to subject themselves to the discipline of research guidance. Students who were placed in the second class at the M.A. examination sometimes made better researchers. Proficiency to read the languages in which the original sources are written was essential. A candidate for the Ph.D. should have a background knowledge of history in breadth as well as in depth. History embraces the whole story of man: Lord Acton has said: "History is not only a particular branch of knowledge but a particular mode and method of knowledge in other branches." A candidate for the Ph.D. in history should, therefore, have a fair knowledge of related subjects, like sociology, political science and economics. Patience, zeal and an aptitude for research are qualities which should be given the highest priority. Superior intelligence, a vigorous interest in the area of specialisation, an imaginative and inventive turn of mind and critical faculties, are other virtues which should be considered an asset in a candidate seeking registration for the Ph.D. It was recommended that a preliminary examination be held for Ph.D. candidates to test particularly their knowledge of the subject and their knowledge of the language and scripts of the original sources.

Attention was focused by Dr. Kulkarni on two pertinent questions, viz., what should be the nature of the topic and who should make the choice of the topic, the research scholar or the guide? As regards the nature of the topic, it was generally agreed that a topic which unearthed fresh information based on new material found in the original sources, or one which gave a new interpretation to existing material in a sufficient measure, was a suitable topic for a Ph.D. thesis. A topic should be definite and limited in time and space. It should be narrow enough to permit investigation on the subject, in depth. Before a topic is finally selected it should be ascertained that sufficient material on the subject is available and within reach of the students. It is also preferable that a research student should not select a topic that has or is being worked on by some other student. Dr. Kulkarni clarified that it should be the student and not the research guide who should select the topic. If the student selects the topic he will have a greater emotional and intellectual involvement in it, he will collect the data with greater zeal,

do more justice to the subject, and therefore complete his thesis much earlier than if the guide selects the subject for him. However, a choice of a topic by a student has a built-in danger. He may sooner or later realise that the problem does not exist at all, or if it does, sufficient available material on the subject is not easy to come by. The general opinion was that as a Ph.D. thesis is a joint project of the guide and the research scholar, the topic should be selected by agreement between the two of them.

The task of a research scholar is a solitary one. He has to collect his material from a library, the archives or from the archaeological sources, with none but his teacher to direct him. The initial task of the research guide, according to Dr. Mrs. Syed, is to ensure that the student frees himself from the bonds of dogmatism, prior prejudices and obscurantism. The research guide should inspire the student with a desire to make a rational enquiry and a scientific analysis of existing beliefs, thoughts and actions of a particular period of history. He should inculcate in the student a vision of human history as a whole, as distinct from history looked at from a sectarian angle. Human values should take precedence over group values, because "no group or class or sect are a chosen people." However, it was accepted that it was inevitable for a research scholar to start his study with a generalised concept. "This generalised concept is like a landmark which may become more distinct, as the collection of factual data increases. As the investigation and study of the available material proceeds, the landmark may emerge more sharply, and a historical problem may be grasped in its concrete reality." However, if the evidence collected disproves the correctness of the original concept, the research scholar will have no alternative but to change his point of view.

Should the student collect the material, write his narrative and then read the modern works, or should he read the modern works before he collects the material and writes his narrative? Dr. K.S. Lal was of the opinion that the writing of the narrative should precede the reading of the modern works, as in these circumstances the narrative would be an authentic version of the researcher's findings, unprejudiced by the viewpoints of modern scholars.

Dr. P.M. Joshi said that the doings of an administration and the life of a people as the administration sees them are reflected in the archives. He mentioned some of the documents which were present in the Bombay archives, for many years under his care. In the

course of the discussion the attention of the audience was drawn to the special importance of family collections available in the Poona archives. It was agreed that archival research was indispensable to students writing a thesis on modern India.

In the concluding address Dr. G.M. Moraes reminded his listeners that the brilliant works of the British Indian orientalists would always be a source of inspiration to Indian historians. Across the academic horizon of the Asiatic Society of Bengal these men wrote "The Golden Age of India." The search for this Golden Age resulted in the revelation of India in its ancient glory. The Asiatic Society of Bombay was created and expected to develop in the image and likeness of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Men like Erskine, Wilks, Malcolm, Elphinstone, and Grant Duff should never cease to inspire Indian students of history. Later Tilak, Bhandarkar and Heras joined this galaxy. His statement was met with applause, particularly intended to be a tribute to the late Father Heras, whose twentieth death anniversary was commemorated by the seminar.

This seminar on "The Guidance of Historical Research," sponsored by the Heras Institute of History and Culture, was probably the first of its kind held within the territory of the Bombay University. The attempts made by the organisers to get the research guides and some research scholars of the Bombay University together, in order that they might pool their experience and ideas, was quite successful. Guidelines were laid down for the selection of students and the selection of topics for the Ph.D. Some of the problems encountered in the course of the actual guidance of research were discussed and solutions offered. The qualifications recommended for the selection of students for the Ph.D. were wisely flexible. Qualities like aptitude for research, zeal and patience, rather than mere success at the M.A. examination, were given the highest priority. Knowledge of the languages in which the original sources were written was considered essential.

A paper on "The Preferences of Students in a Research Guide" would have been of help. Should a guide have a specialised knowledge of the area and the period on which he guides research? Should he (she) have a knowledge of the language in which the original sources are written? These are some of the questions which disturb research students. Of course, most students assume that their guides are in fact competent to direct them. But it is necessary to put these assumptions, which may be based on faith, on a rational

footing. This issue might well be taken up for consideration at the next seminar.

The seminar also adopted a flexible attitude in the selection of topics for Ph.D. dissertations. The initiative in the selection of a topic should be taken by the student, but the topic should also be acceptable to the guide. This seems to be the correct position, for the Ph.D. is a joint task of the guide and the student, with the student taking the initiative and the guide providing only the research direction. It would have been good for the seminar to have spelt out some concrete topics for Ph.D. dissertations, related to modern approaches to research. For example, some periods of Indian history, as they are at present dealt with, make it appear that history is a history of kings, governors-general and political personalities. Should not the history of a country be approached from angle of its people? In the selection of topics for research, the Ph.D. students should take the initiative in selecting topics which will throw light on the political, economic, and social power-structures of a given society in a particular period, and the people's relations to them. Again, if the topic deals with intellectual history or the history of cultural and artistic expressions, these should be related to the social situation of the period. Writers of text and reference books who make use of the Ph.D. dissertations for their source material will then be able to write the history of India, as a history of its people, more completely.

The seminar was opportunely timed, coming as it did when college teachers had been asked to improve their academic qualifications in order to reap the maximum benefit of the U.G.C. scales. This new provision in the terms and conditions of service has made some college teachers research-conscious. Others believe that research should not be under compulsion. Even though the eligibility for the new U.G.C. scales may originally motivate teachers to undertake research, seminars of this description can help to channel research consciousness in a proper academic direction.

Considering the academic controversy in the Bombay University and the country at large, the seminar might have considered the problems connected with the M.Phil. in History. Should the M. Phil. be an intermediary or a terminal degree? Should it combine the study of particular subjects with research? The M.Phil., one feels, should not merely be an extension of the M.A. by research. The study of a particular subjects should be intimately connected in order to achieve

one single purpose—the making of an able historian. Experienced research workers have suggested that the syllabus for the M.Phil. should include a research-oriented dissertation, a study of historical theory and historical method, and a study in depth of the area and period of dissertation.

But should the M.Phil. be linked up with the U.G.C. scales? Is it not preferable that U.G.C. scales should be related to a rational standard of living and a national wage policy? The questions that follow are restricted to problems related to research in history, though some of them may be part of a wider issue. How will the limited number of qualified teachers and research guides in history be able to cope with the large number of college teachers who will be desirous of registering for the M.Phil. and the Ph.D. in the light of the new provisions in the terms and conditions of service? Will not teachers who are motivated to undertake research in order to qualify for pay scales bring down the standard of research in the University? Have similar stipulations in foreign universities, which have resulted in the proliferations of research publications, produced research of a high standard? Are stipulations which are made for foreign universities relevant to the Indian academic situation at the undergraduate level? These are questions directly related to the guidance of historical research. When the next seminar on “Research in History” is held, these issues may usefully be taken up for consideration.

*Cynthia Deshmukh*  
Bhavan's College, Bombay

II  
THE FUTURE OF HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH IN INDIA





## The Role of National Bodies

K.S. LAL

Professor and Head, Department of History  
University of Jodhpur

It was with a sense of satisfaction as well as gratitude that I responded to the invitation to this symposium on the future of historical research in India. Exchange of views at such symposia helps us keep abreast of the latest trends in historical research, and I am sure we will gain immensely from the deliberations today. The contribution of the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture to the service of Clio need not be emphasised here—it is very well known. Reverend Father H. Heras was an institution in himself and he devoted his life to the study of Indian history and culture. His association with the Indian Historical Records Commission was of long duration. Of the Indian History Congress he was a founder member. At the first session of the Indian History Congress, held at Poona in 1935, he was elected a member of the provisional Working Committee; his election to the Working Committee was confirmed in 1938 and again in 1941. This speaks for his devotion to historical research and the esteem in which he was held by his colleagues in the Indian History Congress. Father Heras was President of Section III at the History Congress Session held at Delhi in 1948. It is, therefore, a matter of privilege that we have assembled here to participate in a symposium which is being held under the auspices of the Institute named after this illustrious historian.

As you all know, the present symposium deals with the important theme of the future of historical research in India. To what extent national bodies like the Indian Historical Records Commission, the Indian History Congress and the Indian Council of Historical Research are contributing to it, will be spelled out in the paper which I am to present to you. Other papers will deal with the contribution of universities and allied institutions as well as independent

workers in the future development of historical research.

I propose to review the contribution of the above-mentioned All-India organisations to the development of historical research to spell out new trends in historical writings, and the aid of border disciplines to these new trends, as well as to outline prospects, and desiderata, etc., of historical research in India.

The contribution of the Indian Historical Records Commission, the Indian History Congress and the Indian Council of Historical Research to the continuance and development of historical studies in the country has been substantial. The Indian Council of Historical Research has come into being recently, while the two other national bodies are more than a generation old and, naturally, they have had enough time to aid the cause of historical research in India. It is just a coincidence that the author of this paper is associated with all these three organisations for periods long and short.

The Indian Historical Records Commission [IHRC] held its 44th Session at Bikaner in January this year (1976). It is an organisation of the Government of India. The Minister of Education is its Chairman and the Director of National Archives, its Secretary. Its members are Government officers, Directors of State Archives and university professors. At its yearly meetings, papers are read, exhibitions are held and an assessment is made of the research work done during the course of the year. The papers deal mainly with the study of documents discovered and new source materials unearthed. These reports published yearly help research scholars to know about the fields already covered and to discover pastures new. At the exhibitions many original documents are brought from various State Archives and universities. In these the viewer sometimes come across, to his very pleasant surprise, precious source material which has a direct bearing on his research but about which earlier he knew little. The IHRC also publishes periodically Bulletins comprising information about Research Theses and Dissertations which acquaint scholars with the research work being carried on at various institutions and universities. The latest Bulletin (no. 7, 1976) gives in brief research subjects on which work for the Ph.D. was being done between January 1972 and December 1973. It also contains a list of recipients of Doctorate Degrees with their topics of research.

The IHRC serves as an advisory body to the National Archives of India, and the Bulletin referred to above has been brought out by the National Archives of India. The National Archives has also

published an Annual Report for 1974. It gives in some detail the archival management of its records, the system of accession, appraisal, checking and arrangements for compilation of reference media (e.g. it says on p. 4 that 2084 documents of the reign of Aurangzeb, Farruk Siyar and Muhammad Shah were classified during the year). It gives details about archival training to librarians in the State Archives. Appendix I gives a list of foreign scholars (83 in number) who consulted records in the National Archives of India during 1974. In Appendix II are detailed subjects of research of the scholars who consulted records, and of published works and microfilms collected at the Archives during 1974.

No further details are necessary, as those listed above give a good idea of the services of IHRC and the National Archives in helping research in the country. Being a government organisation and being primarily an advisory body of the National Archives, the sphere of activity of the IHRC has its limitations. In the first place, archives are not a library. They are a repository of government records meant primarily for the use of government consultations. Naturally not many scholars have access to them, although facilities for research are not denied to a genuine scholar. But not many scholars can come to Delhi, the more so because there are no hostel facilities available at the Archives. Consequently, it is mostly from Delhi and Calcutta that researchers are found working there. In the second place, the Archives have records only from the year 1600 onwards. The earlier period does not fall within the purview of the Archives and the IHRC. But for these few limitations and drawbacks, the work of the IHRC has been commendable in encouraging research in Modern Indian History in the country.

The Indian History Congress [IHC] will hold its 37th Annual Session at Calicut this December. Its first session was held at Poona in 1935. Since then it has met almost every year in one or other university centre in the country. The IHC does not cater only to Modern Indian History. Scholars of Ancient, Medieval and Modern Indian History come to participate in its deliberations from all over the country. Recently, besides the Ancient, Medieval and Modern History, Sections of Epigraphy and on History of Countries other than India have also been introduced. Papers on all these groups are classified under Political History, Social and Economic History and so on, and every year the IHC brings out of its Proceedings Volume. The result is that we have some very valuable volumes of research

articles from scholars old and new, available for consultation by researchers.

The membership of the IHC has grown steadily. The interest of its members in the organisation has not flagged. Stalwarts like Shafaat Ahmad Khan, Tara Chand, C.S. Srinivasachari, Mohammad Habib, P.V. Kane, S.K. Aiyengar, M.M. D.V. Potdar, G.S. Sardesai, R.C. Majumdar and many more like them have guided its destinies for long (some, alas, are now with us no more). However, sometimes when people from South India could not attend a session in the North, it was thought that they were not very happy with the working of the IHC, or when in Calcutta, the Institute of Historical Studies was set up, it was suspected that it was created as a parallel body to the IHC. In an organisation where office-bearers are chosen through election, such situations do arise sometimes. However, occasional differences have not come in the way of the service the IHC has been rendering to historical research and its promotion.

The IHC had planned to bring out a Comprehensive History of India in several volumes. But up to now only two or three volumes have been published, while the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan has brought out several volumes during the last few years. In spite of this shortcoming, the contribution of the Indian History Congress to the study of Indian History has been of great value. Its Proceedings contain articles of great research value and the back numbers of some are selling for even more than Rs. 100/- each.

I am a member of the Indian Historical Records Commission and the IHC, of the latter since 1943. I was president of the Medieval History Section of the IHC in 1958 at Trivandrum and have served as its Treasurer from 1965 to 1967.

Recognising the importance of giving proper direction to historical research and of encouraging and fostering objective and scientific writing of history, the Government of India decided to establish the Indian Council of Historical Research [ICHR] as an autonomous body. The council was duly constituted and inaugurated on 27th March 1972 at New Delhi by the then Vice-President of India, Dr. Gopal Swaroop Pathak.

The aims and objectives of the Council are

“to bring historians together and provide a forum for exchange of views among them;

to give a national direction to an objective and rational present-

ation and interpretation of history;  
to promote, accelerate and coordinate research in history with special emphasis on areas which have not received adequate attention so far;  
to promote a co-ordinated and balanced distribution of research efforts over different areas; and  
to elicit support and recognition for historical research from all concerned and ensure the necessary dissemination and use of its results.”

In implementing the objectives, the Council will cover history in its broader aspect including the history of art, literature and philosophy and allied subjects such as archaeology, numismatics, epigraphy and the historical study of manuscripts. It is also to encourage research in neglected or new areas such as economic and social history, historical geography, history of science and technology. It also proposes to maintain a National Register of research workers in history and their fields of specialisation, and to act as a clearing house of ideas and information of historical research in India and abroad by organising and sponsoring seminars, symposia, etc. The ICHR gives publication grants and fellowships. It publishes source materials also, and thus supplements the work of the Indian Historical Records Commission and the National Archives of India. It has a translation programme under which important books and source materials are made available to a large section of scholars throughout the country. It sends delegations to conferences in India and abroad and, above all, it brings out the Council's journal called the *Indian Historical Review*. This journal contains thematic articles and reviews of books. During the four years of its existence the ICHR has done commendable work. It has large funds at its disposal, and finances research projects of scholars who may be working individually or in collaboration with others. The projects it has sponsored and subsidized (as listed in its Newsletters) give an idea of its contribution in the domain of historical research in India.

The Indian Historical Records Commission, the Indian History Congress and the Indian Council of Historical Research are all All-India bodies. There are other organisations equally important, if not more, which have been in the service of historical research for years and decades. There is the famous Bharat Itihas Sanshodhak Mandal. The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, the Oriental

Research Institute at Baroda, the Institute of Historical Studies at Calcutta, the Centre of Advanced Studies at Simla, not to speak of the Heras Institute, and other similar organisations, whose number is indeed very large, are working in one way or the other in the service of Clio. Similarly, every State in the country has its own Historical Society and Regional Records Survey Committee. But their work does not fall within the purview of this paper. We shall, therefore, confine ourselves only to the three All-India organisations under review, and discuss prospects, possibilities, obstacles and desiderata with regard to their contribution to historical research.

The fact that the government of India has established the Indian Council of Historical Research makes some people think that research sponsored by it may be value-loaded if not openly propagandist. The Council too plans "to develop a body of talented young historians, . . . to identify and encourage research talent, (and) . . . to institute and administer scholarships and fellowships for historical research." The fear is reinforced by the fact that large funds are available with the Council and these may be used to influence the minds of young historians. But the fear from the financial power of ICHR and the trend it wants to set in historical research need not be entertained. Talented young historians do need funds and fellowships for their researches, but historical scholarship in India was not on sale at any time in the past, and it is my conviction, it will not be in the future. Nor should there be any apprehension about the new trends emerging in the domain of historical research. What are these new trends? Let us begin with what is known as Left History. After the problem emerging from the Industrial Revolution (especially the exploitation of labour by capitalists) came to the forefront, it was but natural for some historians and social scientists to line up behind labour and the proletariat. But the influence of Karl Marx is not confined to Indian historical scholarship alone. As Jacques Le Goff has aptly remarked: "most historians consciously or unconsciously came under the influence of Marxism, whether to follow it, more or less rigidly, or to challenge it, more or less openly."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately there are many Left historians in India but little Left history, for so much energy is wasted on criticising practising historians in university faculties and even in cafeterias

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Le Goff, "Is Politics still the Backbone of History?" trs. by Barbara Brayl in *Daedalus*, Winter, 1971.

and restaurants, "over a cup of coffee," that little time or talent is available for writing genuine Left history resulting from analytical study and research. But the criticism by the Left historians receives rebuttal in equal measure by the anti-Left. John A. Garraty, Professor of American History at Columbia University observes: "This Left history, needless to say, is extremely controversial . . . it is one-sided and deliberately partisan . . . They [its authors] search not for absolute truth but for what they call a usable past." But he aptly adds: "All history should be constantly examined," and that "historical interpretations serve not only to throw light but also to make us aware of what still remains in the dark."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the new trends of Left history are found to be developing not only in India but all over the world. If the Left history is not deliberately used exclusively as an instrument of propaganda for an ideology, it is surely a desideratum.

The attempt of IHC and ICHR to de-emphasise political history again is nothing new. Voltaire was not happy with only the history of "kings, ministers and generals." Historians like Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre consider political history as obsolete and out of date. As early as 1857, Jules Michelet wrote that he could not confine himself to political history as "a great vital movement was needed, because all these diverse elements [of religion, law, geography, literature, art, etc.] gravitated together in the unity of the story."<sup>2</sup> No wonder the modern bias is for social and economic history, although some do not entirely like it. The great Dutch historian Johan Huizinga was not attracted by social and economic history, and turned his main efforts to the establishing of a scientific and cultural history. In India, with historical monuments still extant throughout the country, and a cultural heritage handed down from Asokan edicts to inscriptions and texts, cultural history is well entrenched. Modern Indian effort, therefore, is for recapturing the social life of the past and hence the emphasis on social history.

The term social history is a little difficult to define. Some hold it to be the history of the poor or lower classes, or the term could even be more specialised as referring essentially to the history of labour and socialist ideas. Some others feel that social history refers to works on a variety of human activities such as manners, customs,

<sup>1</sup>J. A. Garraty, "Re-examining American History," in *Horizon*, U.S.A., no. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Cited by Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, New York, 1953, p. 154.



every day life, and not particularly oriented towards the lower classes. Then there is the famous definition of G.M. Trevelyan that social history is "History with the politics left out."

Today, however, social history is taken to be as one in combination with economic history, and thus it is a departure from the classical political history, as it studies the economy of the structure and changes in society and more especially the relationships between social groups. It is this social and economic history that is considered to be more important than political history and is being popularised by the ICHR. But as said earlier, this is nothing new even in India, if we keep in mind the works of old stalwarts like U.N. Ghoshal, R.K. Mukherjee, K.P. Jayaswal, A.S. Altekar, W.H. Moreland, Tara Chand, K.M. Ashraf, N.N. Law, R.C. Dutt, Bal Krishna, S. Natrajan and K.M. Munshi, to mention only a few. The difference is only about emphasis on the history of people rather than only on the history of the rulers and the ruling classes. It is now being realised that historians who before World War I were regarded to be leaders in their fields, and who dominated the scholarly scene, did not produce works that contained new interpretations or that made the past meaningful to the present. Hence the shift in emphasis. But while political history cannot now aspire to autonomy, it cannot be ignored. Political history may no longer be the backbone of history, but it remains its nucleus. Febvre has, therefore, correctly asserted: "There is no such thing as economic or social history. There is just history."

Be that as it may, there is one great obstacle in the path of historical research on social history. The source material on social and economic history in India is limited if not scarce. Therefore, one has to take recourse to border disciplines as well as to move into areas hitherto unexplored. For example, for the study of socio-economic history, research is necessary in demography and kinship, urban studies in so far as these fall within our field, and classes and social groups, and their tensions. The study of "mentalities" or collective consciousness or of "culture" in the anthropologist's sense too must be undertaken. Research in social and economic history would not be complete without the study of cases of transformation of societies (for example, modernization or industrialization), social movements, and phenomena of social protest.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>E. J. Hobsbawm, "From Social History to the History of Society," *Daedalus* winter, 1971.

It is very desirable, therefore, to have recourse to anthropology, historical psychology, sociology, etc., in historical research. History must be based on evidence, not on conjecture or opinion. The historian, therefore, naturally clutches at any bit of evidence, obtained even through archaeology and epigraphy. But where there is restricted or no evidence about the ideas of a community at certain point of time, or about the mind of a nation or the set-up of a society, anthropology and sociology come to our rescue. It is rightly believed that if historians used the results of all other fields of knowledge, especially of sister disciplines, they would be able to show the evolution of the human mind and describe the mind or mentality of an entire epoch and analyse the motives behind its actions with greater precision.

However, the tendency to overload historical narrative with sociological jargon, or to so treat history as if it were a sub-study of sociology or psychology, is not healthy. Historians must always insist on evidence. Even if it is as fragile as an antique misshaped piece of stone or as sophisticated as a document in the National Archives, the evidence must be there. History, therefore, while seeking the help of other disciplines, should not permit itself to be dominated by them.

Similar is the case presented by overloading history with quantification. It is interesting to note that mathematics and even electronic computers are being taken advantage of in determining data in history. Some are of the opinion that what can be clearly put in figures is confused when narrated in lengthy passages. In the words of Michael Kammen, for instance, "many issues which turn crucially on quantitative dimensions are disguised by words. . . . (they) do not become apparent because they are put forward in words instead of in numbers or equations."<sup>1</sup> Others take cliometricians to task "for needlessly using esoteric equations to 'prove' a point—equations that confuse rather than clarify. . . . clear writing represents clear thinking."<sup>2</sup> A middle course would be far better, for taking quantification to ridiculous levels make history not only uninteresting but untrue. Human affairs and matters connected with the human mind cannot be set down in arithmetical terms—figures, data and statistics.

<sup>1</sup>*The American Scholar*, 44, no. 3, Summer, 1975.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Passen, from Prologue of *A Historian's Perspective*, 1971.

A very laudable attempt of the ICHR is to “encourage the production of popular [historical] literature which would foster an objective understanding of India’s cultural heritage.” The wide gulf between the modern academic historians and the general public is not unjustifiably deplored. The days of Macaulay may not be resurrected, and works on history may not aspire to be best-sellers, but these need not also be too pedantic and aloof. Since World War II the relations between professional historians and the reading public have moved gradually into a new and more hopeful phase. Indian scholarship should also produce works similar to those of Croce, H.G. Wells, Huizinga and Allen Nevins, so as to foster an understanding and appreciation of India’s great cultural heritage.

But production of popular historical literature should not mean dilution of the quality of academic research. And here the IHC and ICHR have still to do something tangible and substantial in one sphere in particular—in helping in the acquisition of knowledge of the language in which source materials are available. The elder scholars did not think that good research work on medieval Indian history could be done without a knowledge of Persian. Today this basic fact is ignored. The language equipment, the primary tool of the researcher, is today by and large weak, and it would be desirable for the ICHR to set up centres of language studies (not only for Persian but also for Sanskrit, Dutch, French, Portuguese, etc.) and give fellowships to scholars who go to study there. The language obstacle to quality research needs to be removed as soon as possible.

While closing, a passage may be quoted from Carr: “Historians are citizens, and as such will, of course, embrace diverse ideologies. Yet whether their aim is to preserve the social order or to change it, historians as historians will profit most from history by studying it open-mindedly, respectful of its diversity and complexity. Whatever their persuasion, the purpose of historians in studying history is to understand it.”<sup>1</sup> The Indian Historical Records Commission, the Indian History Congress and the Indian Council of Historical Research, in one way or another, are helping to spread this understanding.

The Indian Historical Records Commission is doing all it can to encourage all facets of research on modern Indian history—it has no biases. The Indian History Congress has Sections on various periods

<sup>1</sup>E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, New York, 1964, p. 29.

and areas of history. Its Proceedings have sub-sections on political and administrative history, social and economic history, on religious history, etc., and no aspect of history is considered unimportant. But while the contribution of the old organisations like the Indian Historical Records Commission and the Indian History Congress to the encouragement of historical research in the country is well-known, the newly established Indian Council of Historical Research is doing a unique service. For once young historians are receiving liberal financial assistance through the agency of the ICHR, and researchers have not now necessarily to work in penury and isolation. This adds to the optimism seen today about the future of historical research in India. However, these organisations are only agencies of encouragement. Genuine and laudable research is the outcome of burning the midnight oil by individual scholars and of work done by universities and similar institutions. I leave it to my colleagues here to assess their contribution to the future of historical research in India.

## The Role of Universities

V.M. REDDI

Professor and Head, Department of History  
S.V. University, Tirupati

I feel greatly honoured to be invited to participate in the symposium on the happy occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Heras Institute. Father Heras has been one of the few pioneers in historical research in India. He was a scholar par excellence and a friend of historians. I think it will be appropriate on an occasion like this to review the problems and prospects of historical research in Indian universities.

Apart from eminent individual researchers, and apart from some institutions like the Heras Institute itself, the French Institute of Indology, Pondicherry, the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, the Centre for Advanced Study and others, the major purveyors of historical research in India happen to be the universities. Since the time when Father Heras founded this Institute the number of universities in our country has increased five-fold; correspondingly, the number of Departments of History. Student enrolment in the discipline of history has grown apace. History as a subject of study and research has gained attraction among the student community, particularly in the south Indian universities with which I am more familiar. While the quantitative involvement is gratifying, the position in regard to qualitative change is far from satisfactory. Naturally, one cannot help asking the questions: Where does the fault lie? What is the future of historical research in our universities and how can the situation be remedied? This paper proposes to deal with these three main questions.

It is true only a few of those who successfully complete the post-graduate course seek enrolment in research. Of these few, some turn to "research" because they cannot be absorbed in any gainful employment (I am here because I could be nowhere else).

Naturally, they do not hesitate to give it up on securing a job. Of those who are genuinely interested in research, some, with a little guidance, are able to activate their intellectual faculties, catch up with the task, and proceed. But many who are admitted into the research programme lack the necessary wider grasp of their main subject, and know very little of the methodology and techniques of research. Some of them, sorry to say, unexpectedly betray ignorance of their own chosen, limited field of research after being engaged in it for some time. Even the distinction between a primary and a secondary source is not known to all of them. It may be added that more often than not historical studies are attempted without reference to the map and atlas. Study of social sciences has not taken its rightful place in the history curriculum. As rightly observed by R.C. Majumdar: "Original research requires a special kind of mental aptitude and intellectual equipment and every one is not suited for it." The rote method of acquiring knowledge, the general habit of avoiding reading of standard works, the routine lecture method (often a monologue!) will have to yield place to teaching methods and techniques that stimulate the mind, sharpen the critical faculties and enable the student to think for himself about his subject.

An additional constraint on the quality of historical research in our country is the researcher's poor equipment of the English language. The situation has become worse since the introduction of regional languages as media of instruction. While at the graduate level instruction is given in regional languages, at the post-graduate level it is still being offered in English. One does not know how long this will continue. Without holding a brief for English, one may say that in the absence of an adequate knowledge of it a variety of problems are likely to crop up in the field of research. Can the researcher handle source material particularly relating to topics on Modern India, or for that matter relating to any segment or any period, without proficiency in English? It may be argued that those interested in research can obtain a working knowledge of it if necessary. Well, the argument is sustained. But in the absence of a widely accepted national language, in which language should the thesis be written? In the regional language? Well, then, how can an otherwise competent examiner, unfamiliar with the particular regional language, comprehend the contents and judge the thesis?

As for source materials, while one cannot expect to have them

all in one place, some of the older Universities, thanks to the efforts of the concerned departments, have sizeable collections of them. But the newer ones are not all comfortably endowed. National organisations and institutions like the I.C.H.R., the U.G.C., and the I.C.S.S.R. could jointly venture to establish Centres of source material. Such Centres can have Consultative Committees, their membership drawn from the University history faculties of the region, which would scrutinise the research proposals and assess the requirements of resources. A collective endeavour of this kind would, while avoiding duplication of research topic, help in the production of quality research.

Perhaps in recognition of the falling standards of research, including historical studies, the M.Phil. course has been contemplated as an intermediary to the Ph.D. programme. With the monetary benefit strung to the obtaining of the M.Phil. degree, there is bound to be a rush of teachers from affiliated colleges. It is a matter of great satisfaction that the U.G.C. has come forward to offer financial support under the Faculty Improvement Programme to those admitted to the M.Phil. programme. It is a move in the right direction, for the reason that a good teacher in an affiliated college is a guarantee for a better type of student entering the portals of a university and a superior type of researcher emerging therefrom.

The era of working on command topics, I mean, macro-studies, is yielding place to the era of micro-studies, i.e., an intensive study of a particular aspect, phase or theme by utilising the local source material which remains, by and large, a virgin field. In many of the Departments of History greater emphasis is still laid on political histories. It is time that kings and dynasties yield to common people and the latter's life and contribution to the sum total of national and human civilisation and culture. There are, of course, departments which have opened new paths. Regional and local histories, economic and social histories, history of material culture, maritime history and so on, have been identified for study and research, but they still remain pointers to the future. Possibly, the I.C.H.R. could commission the writing of standard works on those themes with a view to seeing that they get incorporated in the postgraduate curriculum and research. Studies of early contacts of the West with India, commencing with the Portuguese, and their effects on the socio-economic life of the people of India, still await deeper consideration, even though there is a sizeable amount of source material available. I may

in this respect point out that, so far as South-East Asia is concerned, some efforts have been made about these aspects, but their scope is not exhausted. As for the "non-Indian" subjects, several Centres, besides those in the Jawaharlal Nehru University, have been established in the universities, thanks to the munificence of the U.G.C. These Centres, while studying the area *per se*, can also relate the studies to the wider context of India and the world. After all, no piece of historical study is adequate and complete without this larger perspective.

It is an accepted fact of academic life that no teacher is worth his job unless he is both a good teacher and a good researcher. If some have not been able to combine both these functions for want of time and physical facilities, these should be provided. The idea of granting sabbatical leave to the teachers of proven ability to engage themselves in wholtime research may be tried to advantage

In brief: (1) The intellectual equipment and urge for research alone should be the criteria for selecting researchers; (2) Although financial support to individual researchers is more than what it used to be some ten years ago, the number of scholarships for subjects like history has to be raised as the U.G.C. and the I.C.H.R. are the only sources for such support. (In science subjects besides the U.G.C., a large number of fellowships are made available by the I.C.A.R., C.S.I.R., PL-480 and so on); (3) The core of source material should be located in selected regional centres (on the pattern of the I.C.S.S.R.) to avoid crowding of researchers at archival centres, national as well as state, and to minimise financial strain on the researcher; (4) Standard works on themes such as maritime history, history of material culture, history of ideas and others should be written by competent scholars to stimulate interest in them; (5) Further efforts should be made for quicker dissemination of information about research work done /undertaken in individual Departments of History; (6) A machinery of consultation and guidance for research may be established; and, (7) The 'sabbatical year' concept may be implemented to facilitate better research output by teachers.

What I have tried to outline above is not new. But the need for reiterating what has often been said has never been felt more than now. This paper will have served its purpose if it has helped give a fillip, however modest, to historical studies and research in the right direction.



## The Independent Worker

LOTIKA VARADARAJAN  
 Honorary Professor for Research  
 Sophia College, Bombay

In order to make an attempt at evaluating the direction of future historical research in India, it is necessary to mention environmental factors which can aid or inhibit the work of the historian in this country. The climate in the past has been such that most of us have been brought up to cherish liberal values associated with the best traditions of English scholarship. India, however, is not affluent in the western sense of the word. Materially we are poor. Resources are few and spread out far too thin. Over and above this, we have to contend with the spectral presence of age-old tradition, ever present amongst us. Under such conditions it would be futile to decry political pressure and communal constraints as leading to distortions in historical perspective, for these pressures can diminish only with time in proportion to a rise in standards of living for all. Perhaps it would be more realistic to accept these as real limitations and then move on to a consideration as to how best these pressures can be neutralised. Historical processes have an inner logic of their own. A given situation has to unfold in its own inexorable manner. This may cause some hardship to the individual who tries to swim against the tide, but sooner or later sanity and a sense of proportion prevail, if for no other reason than that these are the most potent forces geared to keeping society on an even keel. This is particularly relevant to third world countries where historical perspectives may be subject to frequent shifts and changes.

Another factor which is very pertinent to the writing of history in emergent countries is the search for national identity. The exigencies of the immediate political environment are brought very close to the workshop of the historian. Certain themes may appear more important than others for the forging of national sentiment. In a

federal framework this may also provide a fillip to parochial myth creation. This situation has again to be accepted for what it is, and a historian has to practice his or her craft to the best of his or her ability. Liberal values lose much of their thrust in such a situation, but this does not mean that the historian must bend with each passing wind in the political firmament. Historical evidence cannot be falsified, for therein lies the fragile barrier separating history from propaganda. These factors inherent to the Indian ambience are very relevant in a consideration of the future of historical research in India.

I will now take up the two principal themes of this paper. Firstly, a statement, in more concrete terms, of the possible channels of future historical research in India, and secondly, the role of the individual worker therein.

The traditional sheet-anchors of historical research in India have been archaeology, numismatics, epigraphy and literary evidence. Along with much else in our intellectual environment, we have adopted these from our European mentors. In saying this I do not in the least intend to belittle the very real utility of these tools. It can, however, be argued that having accepted European methodology, training and standards of historical veracity, we can now perhaps press other instruments better suited to our own environment into use. The writing of Indian history no longer betrays an exclusive preoccupation with chronology, battles and imperial accomplishments. Topics and themes cannot be compartmentalised into neatly labelled boxes any more. In attempting to demonstrate the multi-dimensional aspect of historical events, perhaps less orthodox methods of approach can also be tried. A study of myths, folklore, the plastic and performing arts, indeed, every aspect of life and activity of traditional India, could well provide material to fill various lacunae in material culled from other sources. Archaeological material could perhaps be made more meaningful to the historian if greater emphasis were placed on co-ordination and integration of material remains with literary sources. A recent study of the potter community conducted by the Department of Archaeology of the M.S. University, Baroda, has thrown up interesting evidence related to the shifting nature of familial and group life at the village level.

There have been very interesting studies of the workings of the caste system in India. Apart from the work of M.S. Srinivas, mention could also be made of F.G. Baily (*Caste and the Economic*

*Frontier*, Bombay, 1958), James Silverberg (ed., *Social Mobility in the Caste System in India*, Paris, 1968), E.R. Leach (*Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan*, Cambridge, 1960), and André Beteille (*Caste, Class and Power*, Bombay, 1969). Burton Stein, in the work edited by James Silverberg, has attempted an historical assessment of caste in South India and has pointed out the difficulties that lie in the way of such a task. A factor which appears to have emerged is that mobility comes into play only when there is a state of disequilibrium. While it is not my intention to pass over the basic inequity of the caste system, it does appear necessary to stress the importance of the harmonious working of the system for an understanding of the social and economic life of the country, particularly at the micro-level.

Oral tradition is another area which could be very fruitfully investigated. Oral tradition as an approach to an understanding of African history is already well accepted. It may well be that oral history would be suitable only for tackling certain situations in India. From a perusal of J. Vansina (*The Oral Tradition*, London, 1965), it would appear that in Africa oral tradition has been provided with a basic homogeneity resulting from the common denominator of tribal society. In India, the nature and function of oral tradition is subject to considerable variation. Oral tradition as fixed in literature such as the Vedic texts would differ a great deal from that which is the product of untutored minds finding expression in folk culture. Experience alone would reveal the framework best suited to the Indian situation. An analysis of toponyms, personal names, temple and *tirtha mahamatyas* could also be included within this sphere. The Nehru Museum, New Delhi, was to have made use of this method in compiling information related to the Freedom Movement in India. It would be of interest to know what its findings have been in this line of investigation.

In view of the basic continuity of Indian tradition in fields which have been relatively untouched by the machine age, extrapolation, provided this is done with utmost caution, can well prove a valid exercise. One sphere in which this method could be put to use is that of the history of navigation in this country. A model that could well be followed for purposes of such an enquiry could be the book *We the Navigators* by David Lewis (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1972). The author, one of the foremost navigators in Australia, has described traditional methods of Polynesian

navigation, highlighting the deep knowledge of natural forces on which Polynesian navigational expertise is based. The lack of technical devices in the European sense constitutes no drawback. The author makes it quite clear that superstition played no part in the growth of sealore. Knowledge of the elements was based on meticulous observation. A trained acute sensory perception and a deep awareness of nature's many manifestations served man, who did not as yet have implements of sophisticated modern technology. A similar study would be of immense value in understanding Indian methods of navigation and indigenous techniques and tools, without which the concept of expansion of Indian trade, commerce and colonisation becomes curiously unidimensional.

With regard to periods—to use that much maligned term—and categories of source materials which can be put to more intensive use, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can form a fertile ground for many different aspects of historical study. This was the twilight period of European presence which made itself physically felt in India for the first time. A study of this period in depth could well provide pointers to the basic nature of Indian society, together with its strength and weakness, which made it grapple ineffectively with the inroads made into its body-politic. About this there is a wealth of source material available. The Portuguese, being the standard-bearers of European navigation to the east, were keen observers of flora and fauna, in particular of aquatic and bird life. A knowledge of these was essential for survival in unknown waters. Dutch records are reputed to be the most detailed available. The importance of English records has already become more than manifest. A determined effort needs to be made to uncover repositories of Indian source material so that the bias of European material can be corrected. In this context I would like to dilate a little on the utility of French source material as the bulk of it remains largely unutilised.

Dr. S.P. Sen, in the chapter entitled “French Historical writing on European activities in India,” in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, edited by C.H. Phillips, has very ably explored the ground covered by French scholars relating to late medieval and modern times. French archival material in Paris is to be found housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Archives Nationales. There is another repository at Aix-en-Provence referred to as Archives d’ Outre Mer. Material at the Bibliothèque Nationale tends

to be more in the form of reports and memoranda. Company correspondence may be found at the Archives Nationales. There is, of course, considerable overlapping. At the time when the Indian Government took over the administration of Pondicherry, all the archival material from the colony was shipped back to France. The printed material left behind has been divided between the Romain Rolland Library and the French Institute. The archival material from Pondicherry dealing with the period from the eighteenth century onwards has been housed at the Archives d' Outre Mer in Aix-en-Provence. Edmond Gaudart had published a catalogue of the Pondicherry holdings entitled *Catalogue des manuscrits des anciennes archives de l' Inde Française—1690-1789* (Tome I, Pondicherry, 1926). The material at Aix-en-Provence has not been catalogued, but assuming that no manuscripts have been lost or misplaced, this earlier catalogue would still be meaningful.

My colleague, Jean Deloche, has stressed the richness of other repositories including libraries such as the Arsenal and others attached to the Ministère de la Guerre and Ministère de la Marine. Among the important documents at the Institut de France are the papers of J.B. Chevalier, Governor of Chandernagore. Municipal libraries such as those of Caen, Rouen, Quimper, Versailles, Aix, La Rochelle, Besançon, Bordeaux and Brest cannot be neglected as memoirs and various other documents framed by company officials may be found dispersed among them. The manuscript used by Deloche for his work on Modave was found at the Municipal Library at Caen.

Other institutions in Paris which have engaged in research activities with a bearing on Indian history are the École des Langues Orientales, Institut de Civilisation Indienne, Société Asiatique, Centre de Recherches d'histoire et Philologie de la IV section, École Pratique des Hautes Études, and Centre d'Études Indiennes de Sciences Sociales. The importance of these institutions lies in the nature of their research activities and the printed works at their disposal, rather than any wealth of archival sources. Scholars owe a debt of gratitude to Mlle. Lobligeois, Librarian of the École Française de l'Extreme Orient. She has been responsible for drawing up a comprehensive file in which she has taken pains to make a list of all documents of relevance to India to be found in libraries in France. Among museums, the Musée Guimet at Paris tends to specialise in Asian galleries much in the same sense as the

Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In the field of maritime history, the Musée de la Marine at Paris has a rich storehouse of material awaiting investigation. The Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle may prove no less relevant to the student of Indian history.

There is, thus, a considerable body of material both published and unpublished which could be very usefully incorporated into Indian research. In the field of archival material, apart from Company correspondence, material was also collected from time to time to be used as the basis for the writing of a history of India. Other manuscripts are intended to serve as manuals of trade and, in this category, the manuscript drawn up by Sieur Roques entitled "La manière de negocier dans les Indes Orientales" framed circa 1678-1680 is of particular interest in view of the importance of Indian textiles as articles of export. Then there are innumerable memoirs, official as well as unofficial. Several of these memoirs attempt to explain why French activities in India were less successful than those of the English. Others deal with the position of the Dutch. All throw considerable light on the history of the period. In view of French links with native powers like the Marathas and rulers such as Tipu Sultan, particularly during the period of the French Revolution, French manuscript material would serve as a valuable adjunct to any histories framed on such subjects. For Maratha studies V.G. Hatakhar has made a valuable beginning in his work entitled *Relations between the French and Marathas 1668-1815* (Bombay, 1958). Dictionaries, and records of Indian beliefs and customs were also compiled. Among the very important collections at the Bibliothèque Nationale are the papers of Anquetil Duperron. There are some papers relating to missionary activity, but for these a direct approach at the headquarters of missions such as the Capuchin and Jesuit Orders, and the papers of the Paris Foreign Missions, would probably yield better results.

Among published material, considerable work has been done in the field of indology and history of the Indian Ocean. The publications of the École Française de l'Extrême Orient are well-known, and indologists such as Sylvain Levi, and Jean Filliozat need no introduction. Among other orientalists, the works of J. Reinaud, Gabriel Ferrand, Paul Pelliot, Henri Cordier and Jean Sauvaget need to be made more easily available to scholars working in India. Reinaud's two-volume work entitled *Relations des voyages fait par les arabes et les persans dans l'Inde et la Chine*, was published in

Paris in 1845. Gabriel Ferrand, in his three-volume work entitled *Instructions Nautiques et Routiers Arabes et Portugais des XV et XVI siècles*, has revealed the rich heritage of Chinese and Arab navigation, and the contributions of this French Algerian to the study of the Indian Ocean cannot be over-emphasised. Paul Pelliot, H. Cordier and Jean Sauvaget have concentrated on the world of Islam, and the publications of the French Institute of Damascus headed at one time by Jean Sauvaget would surely be very relevant to studies on medieval India. In this connection I would also like to make mention of a translation by Henri Cordier of Masudi from Arabic to French available in nine volumes and published between 1861 and 1874. Jean Deloche, a member of the *École Française*, has published, apart from *Recherches sur les routes de l'Inde* and *Voyage en Inde du Conte de Modave 1773-1776*, a work entitled *Ponts Anciens de l'Inde*. His forthcoming work entitled *La Circulation Ancienne*, in two volumes, volume one covering "La voie terrestre" and volume two being devoted to "La voie de l'eau," is sure to arouse a great deal of interest. My learned colleagues at Calcutta, Dr. Aniruddha Ray and Dr. Indrani Ray will, I am sure, throw much light on various aspects of Indian history by their respective researches based on the study of French source material. The Historical Society of Pondicherry is attempting, against considerable odds, to continue the tradition set by the *Revue Historique de l'Inde Française*. The Secretary, Frank Anthony, and his colleagues deserve every kind of encouragement to continue their work. The volume on Pondicherry to be brought out with the collaboration of Frank Anthony in the series of Indian Gazetteers will be eagerly awaited. François Gros in his presentation of the work by de Vaisseau Cordier entitled, *Historique Statistique de Karikal* (Publications de l'Institut Français d'Indologie, no. 44), and Jean Deloche in his article entitled "La mémoire de Moracin sur Macilipattanam" (*Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*, 1975), have demonstrated how much material is available in French unpublished sources for the social and economic history of the various regions which at one time formed part of the French possessions in India.

In making mention of these different categories of source material the necessity for the establishment of a well-equipped documentation centre needs to be stressed. The older and better endowed Indian libraries are reasonably well equipped as far as earlier pub-

lications are concerned, but most are woefully inadequate with regard to the more recent ones. Library grants need to be substantially increased, and perhaps there would be a case for departmental rather than centralised funding of books. In view of the large number of journals published, it is possibly utopian to desire that all should be available at any single institution. It should, however, be made feasible for a scholar to procure off-prints of articles which are desired speedily and at low cost irrespective of language, date or place of publication. It would be a tautology to state that libraries hold the key to knowledge, but it needs to be stressed that unless the status of librarians is improved, it will not be possible to attract persons of the desired calibre to the profession. The service aspect of the job needs to be adequately appreciated by the academic community, rather than the tendency to regard librarians as little more than those paid to catalogue and keep a proper record of library assets.

I will now take up the second theme of my talk – the role of the independent research workers. I wish to state at the outset that I shall be using the term *independent* and *individual* synonymously. Individual research workers fall into two categories: those who have no alternative occupation, and those who are otherwise gainfully employed. I will take up the latter category first. Certain government departments such as Archives, Gazetteers, Social Welfare, Census Operations, Town Planning, Handicrafts Board, Craft Councils, etc. offer research opportunities in the course of work. The contributions of those working in Museums and services such as the Archeological Survey cannot be over-emphasized. It is usually possible to obtain leave of absence for intensive work. Economic hardship is minimal as there is security of tenure and some form of financial support is usually available during periods of study leave. When I talk of the conditions of work of the independent workers, I will not, by and large, include this category, but devote myself to the professionally trained historian who has no other means of livelihood.

Whereas under the British administration it was possible for distinguished amateurs such as Prinsep, Fleet and a host of others to make substantial contributions to historical scholarship, this is no longer possible as routine duties in the services are far more arduous and time-consuming under the present people's government. Even a few decades ago it was possible for independent



research workers to function as it was possible for those, fortunate enough, to be assured of their own means of support. Today this category is being gradually squeezed out because of the exigencies of the economic climate. Under present conditions it is essential for the full time research worker to have some form of official patronage. The University Grants Commission and Indian Council of Historical Research have shown an awareness of this, while a few fellowships such as the Nehru and Bhabha Fellowships are open to all without any necessity of institutional affiliation.

The question may now be posed as to the specific role of the independent worker and the advantages and disadvantages inherent in such a role. The individual worker has to maximise his/her particular abilities and skills. Massive surveys and monumental works are best left to institutional effort. Problems have to be such as to lend themselves to the research efforts of a single person working within a limited schedule of time. The data to be sifted should not stretch over too broad a spectrum and fields of investigation should also be such as can be adequately managed by the resources available to the single individual. Local history and area studies are subjects which suggest themselves for this kind of investigation. Depending on aptitude, aspects of art history, cultural history, development of theoretical models, all of which require a considerable degree of conceptualisation and creative insight, could also be meaningfully tackled.

There are many advantages in being able to work in an individual capacity. There is a much greater degree of freedom both with regard to the manner of operation as also to that of allocation of time. Unpalatable findings do not need to be watered down, nor is any form of approach by consensus a necessary feature. It is possible to avoid all commitments not directly related to the work in hand. The frustrations of having to work tandem with others, whose performance may be unequal in pace and intensity, are blissfully absent. More often than not, the individual worker has to build up personal contacts rather than trust to official channels. This may, in the long run, foster a much deeper sense of collaboration and yield an infinitely richer harvest.

There are also several disadvantages under which a whole time independent worker has to labour, and these can even prove inhibitory to a suitable pace of work. The individual worker suffers from the limitation of having to deal with every aspect of the prob-

lem single-handed. These could stretch from mundane activities such as the securing of competent secretarial assistance and having to cope with complicated travel arrangements, which have more often than not to be performed on a shoe-string budget, to more serious drawbacks such as lack of research assistance, and the skills necessary to deal with manifold aspects of problems in a research climate which is verging increasingly towards a transdisciplinary approach. Linguistic attainments and ability to shift comfortably from one discipline to another pose a greater challenge to the individual than to the group. Moreover, individual workers operate in a kind of isolation which no colleague working within the womb of institutional security could ever experience. There is little opportunity to discuss problems, obtain varied points of view, and correct faulty methodology. The social milieu can also offer cause of embarrassment. Very often the independent worker makes a conscious choice of a research career opting out of the plums of office and the perquisites of power. Unfortunately in a status-conscious society such as ours, the lack of position within an easily recognisable hierarchical ladder can create difficulties, if not prove positively obstructive. One has to establish that one is what is called a *bona fide* scholar, before one is allowed entry into libraries and archives. Even after this hurdle is overcome it is often a painstaking process to gain access to all the material available. It would appear that the bonhomie generated as a result of joint participation in selection committees, examinerships, membership of august bodies and appointment as official delegate to important meetings and awe-inspiring symposia, cannot be duplicated by any of the avenues available to the independent worker. It would be helpful if the key to knowledge lay open to all irrespective of status.

Unless the more serious among these limitations are dealt with, the independent worker will soon disappear from the field as, indeed, has happened in the sphere of scientific endeavour. It can, of course, be argued that individuals working in various institutions, who may not be full-time independent workers, can fulfill the same role. This is valid up to a point, for the main advantage of a full-time independent research worker is that of the ability to take a project and see it through to completion without interruption. Total mobility is another advantage, particularly under conditions obtaining in India where source material stretches over a wide spectrum and has to be tracked down to a variety of persons, places and institutions.

These problems would not be solved if the role of the independent worker were to be institutionalised for the unique position of such a worker would then be lost. Economic props would have to be provided on a semi-permanent basis, but some kind of control mechanism is also necessary. The output of the research worker is not measurable in the same manner as that of the lecturer, the Ph.D. guide or the office worker. Any review committee has to keep this in mind and show some elasticity in assessment of output. This is not an argument in favour of total freedom. The independent research worker has to be accountable, but the yardsticks used have to be suitably devised in order to draw forth the best results. I have not mentioned individual workers by name. Many names can be invoked from the past, but the numbers at the present moment are small. My immediate knowledge is confined to the few with whom I have had the privilege to come into contact with in the city of Bombay, but it would be presumptuous to quote them by name without their permission. Moreover, because of the kind of anonymity under which independent workers function, for every individual mentioned, there may be several others, particularly among those writing in vernacular, whose contributions merit equal recognition. However, it would be difficult to conceive how under present conditions an independent worker of the calibre and achievements of Maharajkumar Raghbir Singh of Sitamau could emerge. All this throws into relief the necessity for a fresh and comprehensive assessment of the role of the independent research worker and the conditions under which such persons can contribute of their best.

## The International Context

ASHIN DAS GUPTA

Professor and Head, Department of History  
Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan

The historian of Indian history, when he comes to assess the last quarter of a century, will be unlikely to miss the resurgence which has marked the period. He may not share the excitement which has been and continues to be ours as we explore the Indian past under vastly changed circumstances and he will be spared the frustrations which have been the inevitable undertones of the historical effort. But the fact that Indian historians, when working at their best, have built new curiosities and delved into depths unsuspected before, will not be doubted. It would be a massive task if I were to substantiate what I have said in any detail, but I hope to establish the major contention by stressing three separate but interrelated themes. First, Indian historians have, by and large, moved away from narrative history built round the political fortunes of selected individuals and towards an examination of the structure within which the individuals have functioned. Secondly, there has been an important effort to dig down to the grass-roots of the Indian past by work in regional and local history. Thirdly, Indian historians, as they have worked on these twin themes directed towards structural explanations built upon an appreciation of India's local societies, have worked in the awareness of an international effort similarly directed. They shared the work with scholars abroad who have brought freshness and posed an important challenge to ethnically Indian historians. My learned listeners will doubtless note and deplore the dogmatic definitiveness of my formulations at this stage. Much effort in Indian history is still devoted to meticulous fact-finding without which no explanations of any kind can emerge. I myself am a convinced believer in narrative history built round the fortunes of individual human beings.

But confessing to all this, I still believe that what is new and refreshing in Indian history is the urge towards a structural explanation of the Indian past. And in this urge both the attempt to understand local history and the awareness of the discipline at an international level play important parts.

The transition from what is somewhat condescendingly described these days as traditional history to whatever it is that has replaced it or is about to replace it, can be rather dramatically illustrated if we consider the explanations advanced in recent years for the downfall of the Mughal empire. I choose this illustration partly because I have been personally and deeply interested in the fascinating debate, but largely because it serves to explain what I mean by the move towards a structural explanation of the Indian past. I need scarcely remind this audience that the great Jadunath Sarkar completed his life's work in the 1950s. It is important to remember that Satish Chandra's *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-1739* came in 1959. It is this remarkable juxtaposition, the emergence of a significantly different explanation following so closely upon the work of the one Indian historian cast in the classic mould, which serves to make the illustration dramatic.

Jadunath Sarkar frankly believed in the individual as the motive-force in history and, less consciously, he believed that history was best explained by examining the fortunes of such individuals as were in apparent control of political power. There was, of course, much else besides in the phenomenon that was Jadunath Sarkar. One has only to remind oneself of his history of the Dasnami Naga order of monks or of his essay on the topography of India in the early 18th century. But our purpose will be best served if we remember him in his major preoccupations. Even here, however, there is no simple clue to his work. I shall explain what I have in mind by reminding you of the major thesis in the classic biography of Aurangzib. Throughout this massively researched book Jadunath considered one central contradiction. Aurangzib was apparently an excellent prince, industrious, austere and astute. But the empire broke in his hand. The riddle was not to be resolved by anything strictly personal to Aurangzib; Jadunath found the ultimate answer in the nature of the Islamic polity which Aurangzib sought to create in his Indian empire. Now, you may consider Jadunath wrong, and indeed my own admiration for the great historian has been marginally diminished by Faruki's powerful critique directed exactly against this final

explanation. At the moment, however, all that I wish to maintain is that even Jadunath did not explain history in terms of an individual's character, but saw the man in terms of his age.

But Jadunath Sarkar never saw the individual as part of a material structure, subject to the changing necessities of objective circumstances. It was in this that Satish Chandra's essay introduced an altogether refreshing pre-occupation. The discussion now began to probe the bases of Indian political power. It was, after all, common sense to suppose that no single individual, however powerful and able, could hope to control an empire of the size of the sub-continent, especially with the undeveloped technology of the late 17th century. There must under such circumstances be a powerful social class to support the despot whether in Mughal India or in Russia of the Romanovs. Satish Chandra transferred the discussion to the Mughal nobility. His argument suggested a crisis for the upper aristocracy of the Mughal empire in the early 18th century. Put briefly, the central contention was that the empire had been sustained by its *mansabdars* who in turn had lived off the *jagirs* of the empire. In the early 18th century there were many more *mansabdars* than were *jagirs* available for distribution. Faced with this material imbalance, the Mughal aristocracy began a protracted civil war, in other words a struggle for survival. The 18th century anarchy is fundamentally to be explained in terms of this struggle to control the land-revenue by different groups of Mughal *amirs*. This, as you will appreciate, is a vastly simplified version of the Chandra thesis, but I hope it indicates how the discussion shifted from a concern with individuals, even with ideas which held such individuals, to an examination of the material structure which supported the Mughal empire.

I do not have to explain how Satish Chandra's work has been followed up by others. Athar Ali in particular has rendered a most valuable service by counting the Mughal *amirs* as they were under Aurangzib. That part of the Chandra thesis which concerned the increasing numbers of the upper aristocracy has by now been soundly underpinned. I shall say soon that the part which concerns the availability of *jagirs* is in a less satisfactory position. But at this point it is well to allude, again very briefly, to the argument of Irfan Habib that the fundamental problem which broke the Mughal empire was the encroachment of the imperial revenue demand upon the subsistence of the Indian peasant. Much of this evil appears to

have been caused by the system which moved *jagirdars* rapidly round the country, inciting them to fleece the peasant during their brief halt in any locality. This important contribution to the debate has widened the area of the discussion and has reinforced the tendency to look at the material structure of the empire albeit at different levels.

The work done by Satish Chandra, Athar Ali and Irfan Habib has one important feature in common. They have all looked at the Mughal imperial system as a whole. Basically conditioned by their documentation, they have surveyed problems from the Mughal imperial chancellery. Much, of course, has happened since they did their researches and they had themselves gone on to more detailed investigations and set others to follow up problems at the local level. Exciting findings from the regional archives are being steadily made available for the history-reading public in India. But as of now, the established picture presents a view from above, lacking in detailed supporting research for the different areas of the Mughal empire.

It is in this context that we may consider the important and refreshing book *Mughal Administration in Golconda* (Oxford, 1975) by J.F. Richards of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, which has recently come to us. This book is a significant contribution to the debate we have been reviewing, and it is useful to notice that the contribution comes from abroad but clearly belongs to the mainstream of Indian historical writing. It embodies the kind of research which demonstrates how ethnically Indian historians and 'Indian historians' abroad can work together towards a richer understanding of the past.

Basically what Richards does is to survey the history of Golconda from 1687 to 1724, and the conclusion he presents is that the Mughals failed to consolidate their new conquests. But he does this work in the awareness of larger problems. "The reasons usually advanced," he writes, "to explain the larger imperial crisis and subsequent decline and collapse do not satisfactorily explain incomplete consolidation in the eastern Deccan. Nor, for that matter, is it possible to assume that the problems of the empire were uniform throughout the Deccan." His findings are that the Marathas made no significant inroads in the Golconda area, and in the first twenty years of Mughal rule the agrarian order remained intact. Contrary to what Irfan Habib believes, oppression of the peasantry was not the function of the Mughal *jagir* system which transferred officers

at short notice, but came from *jagirdars* who could not be transferred. Put differently, the local peasantry were fleeced not because the Mughal system worked but because it did not work. Similarly, his facts show that although the general malaise which affected the Mughal *mansabdar* class and made it inefficient everywhere, was in evidence in Golconda, it was not because there was any lack of productive *jagirs* to take care of them. What went wrong was that the available *jagirs* could not be properly utilised. In an important way Richards brings the discussion back to the central figure of Aurangzib. We are once more presented with a crisis not so much in the material structure of the empire but in authority. This does not, I should add, affect my basic contention that we are by and large moving towards a structural explanation of the Indian past. If Richards should be proved right, the discussion will revert to earlier considerations, but much enriched by analysis of the material structure. And it will take very many years to exhaust the problems posed by the structure.

It is necessary at this stage to ponder a few points of definition. What I have said so far, taken at a simple level, amounts to saying that while men like Jadunath Sarkar wrote history in which individuals were important, the new history of the 1960s has emphasised the importance of the material structure. This is neither profound nor particularly impressive. If, however, we try to consider the implications of J.F. Richards, some other considerations emerge. It would be folly to think that Richards is simply pushing the discussion of the fall of the Mughal empire back to where it started. It would be much more to the point to follow Richards and see individuals like Aurangzib not as playthings of circumstances but agents with some independence shaping the circumstances to some extent for good and evil. The discussion does not go back to square one, but emerges on a higher level. There is no mechanical line of demarcation between men and their world, but a dynamic relationship. Any work on 'structures' must take this fact carefully into account.

Structures, if we now think of them again, are not necessarily the material artifacts and arrangements within which and with which men act; structures mean human relationships and settled modes of behaviour as well as any other given condition which the individual accepts in life. The discussion of Indian nationalism which began in earnest with the publication of Anil Seal's *Emergence of Indian Nationalism* in the 1960s would illustrate the point that I now wish



to make. Earlier studies of Indian nationalism with some honourable exceptions had emphasised the role of individual leaders and stressed the spirit of self-sacrifice and dedication which drove such men. Pretending to an arrogance for the sake of brevity, I would call this the world of Pattabi Sitaramaiya. This kind of presentation of Indian nationalism was in part a response to earlier denigration and in part a component of the struggle itself. None the less it was a simple view of a complex situation. And when Anil Seal drew our attention to the interests of the various groups involved in Indian nationalism, he was transferring the discussion to the structure of the movement. Much again has happened since this debate, and scholars now known as the Cambridge School have come perilously near to denying the very existence of nationalism in India. Understandably there has been a sharp reaction among historians in India, and some excellent work seeking to understand the structure of Indian nationalism has already been done with considerable more under way.

I must make it clear that I am not interested in making assessments of the different intellectual debates which I am using to illustrate my contentions. The debate on the nature of Indian nationalism has moved historians from a simplistic view of individual heroes to a more complex understanding of men reacting with their environment, material and moral. Scholars who worked with or thought with Anil Seal seemed in some danger of saying that nationalism in India was nothing more than a struggle to forward their interests among different regional and social groups. Naturally enough they faced the criticism that they were throwing the baby out with the bath-water. It is of some interest to notice that in one recent publication of the Cambridge School there appears a faint afterthought on this score. "India under British rule" writes Francis Robinson in *Separation Among Indian Muslims. The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923* (New Delhi, 1975) "had its fair share of selfless men and selfish men, of heroes and cowards, of great men and ordinary men. There were many who went to goal for the cause; there were some who betrayed it. This study illustrates the role of those who were fired by religious beliefs or spurred by nationalist ideals; it also illustrates the many calculations of advantage and political interest which every politician must make. A man may have both ideals and political skills, indeed he must temper the former with the latter if he is to survive in politics. Only in

myth does Shiva drive a straight path through the opposition with his trident. In human affairs great national leaders must bow before the political process; they must make accommodations with their fellow-men. This is not to deny their greatness but to emphasise another dimension of it—their mastery of politics.” This may amount to no more than a gesture to the gods, with the attention of the historian still riveted upon the calculations and the accommodations, but still it is an advance upon the description of Indian nationalism as no more than ‘shadow boxing’ with the British Raj, with which Anil Seal fired the first salvo.

The network of interests within the nationalist movement has engaged the attention of the Cambridge School. This network belongs to the structure of nationalism as we have understood the term in this essay. It is, however, perfectly possible to see the individual against and in terms of the structure. Recently a superb demonstration of it has come in S. Gopal’s biography of Jawaharlal Nehru. With Jawaharlal Nehru as its subject, the biography has naturally a great deal of idealist thinking, dreams and passionate hopes. But Gopal has most usefully indicated the functioning of the right-wing within the Congress and underlined the role of men like Chakravarty Rajagopalachari, B.G. Kher and K.M. Munshi. Gopal’s Nehru is by no means a hero beyond reproach, and he does not act in a vacuum which he fills with his idealism. Much of the time we see Nehru in near complete isolation within the Congress, contending with forces he does not understand. But the massively researched biography, while stressing the limitations of the man and the contradictions of circumstances, conveys the excitement of the movement and, in the words of Orwell, eventually leaves a good taste in the mouth. It is possible, I think, that the international discussion on the nature of Indian nationalism will gradually be seen as a matter of accent and emphasis. The progress here as in the debate on the Mughals may well be from the individual to the structure and back to an understanding of the two in dynamic tension.

It is important for us to note that the scholars of the Cambridge School after initial statements of an all-India character have concentrated more and more upon regional and local studies. Besides Robinson on the U.P., we have had Baker and Washbrook on South India and Gordon Johnson on Bombay. Any worthwhile research in Indian history is bound to go through this rhythm of a central statement followed by or emerging out of local studies. In this

context I would like now to turn to a kind of enquiry which is still completely new to the Indian historian and try to explain briefly how Indian maritime history is at present in the making, mostly in the shape of limited case-studies of India's trading areas and port-cities.

There are in fact not one but three good reasons why we should consider the development of Indian maritime studies. First, it shows how scholars in Indian history are not merely following development elsewhere in the historical discipline and are content to apply them to Indian fields, but are themselves developing fresh lines of enquiry. Secondly, and as I just said, it shows the crucial importance of local studies. Thirdly, the nature of the enquiry is such that eventually it is bound to overflow the limits of conventional history and raise questions about the validity of the interdisciplinary approach, which is at the moment anxiously being debated among historians everywhere.

Maritime history is a new subject not only in India but almost everywhere else. Only Harvard University, to my knowledge, has established a chair in oceanic history. The study of the subject is, of course, particularly new to<sup>3</sup> Asian countries. Historians of Europe and America have done some significant work on the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, but the Indian Ocean has yet been barely touched by researchers. At the meeting of the International Commission in Maritime History in San Francisco in 1975, only Japan was properly accredited from Asia. At this meeting we learned that a maritime history group had been functioning in Japan for the last ten years, but no other Asian country has as yet taken up the enquiry with any seriousness. In India, however, the subject has an important ancestry. A great deal has been written on the history of the European East India Companies trading to India ever since the 17th century and for the earlier period of the 16th century some work has been done on the Portuguese presence in India and the Indian Ocean. Besides, there has been some little effort to understand the history of Indian shipping and mercantile communities of the ancient and medieval epochs. These attempts cannot be seen as maritime history proper because the questions had been asked in the context of political, economic and social histories rather than consciously in the maritime field. But maritime history itself is a product of these different disciplines with the addition of new dimensions of the social sciences like anthropology and sociology.

India, I should think, is well-placed to develop an important new line of enquiry if Indian historians become aware of the range of problems with which maritime history deals.

The major difficulty for the Indian maritime historian is, of course, the absence of significant case-studies on which any general formulation of problems can be based. It is true that W.H. Moreland did pioneering work in putting together some general appreciation of the Indian seaboard. But his work was heavily biased by a Eurocentric vision which has dogged all Indian efforts in the field ever since. Put briefly, the Eurocentric approach to Indian maritime history considers Indian developments as extensions of European activity in coastal India. Thus, we have had a series of studies devoted to the experience of the European Companies in India, and the assumption has been that this kind of history should serve as genuine Indian history. It is only recently that an awareness has grown of the fact that the European was only one factor in the rich and complex evolution of maritime India.

To a large extent this awareness is due to the work of a Dutch sociologist-historian who never worked in Indian history. Jacob van Leur, disciple of Max Weber, wrote his essays on Indonesia and the Indian Ocean largely in the 1930s. He was the first to maintain that Asian trade was the equal of whatever Europe possessed till the 18th century, and Asian history must never be seen as extension of European activity. But the main difficulty to which van Leur had no solution, and to which we are yet to provide an answer, was a paucity of proper sources. The great difference between maritime history, say, of the Mediterranean and that of the Indian Ocean lies in this, that while historians like Frederick Lane have fabulously rich local archives at their command, no such thing exists for the historian of the Indian maritime experience. Nevertheless work has now begun which attempts to concentrate on Indian merchants and the Indian coastal world despite the fact that the subject has to be approached through European documentation. Recently we have had Surendra Gopal's *Commerce and Crafts in Gujarat, 16th and 17th Centuries* (New Delhi, 1975) which has this great virtue, that it steadily focusses on the Gujarati merchant despite the fact that the sources are almost exclusively English. Similarly Susil Chaudhuri in his *Trade and Commercial Organization in Bengal, 1650-1720* (Calcutta, 1975) has made an admirable attempt to tell the story in the full awareness of the Indian reality. It is true that we are as yet

unable to break through to the Indian world, and we shall fail in this as long as there are no adequate Indian sources. But the day of the fake Indian history is over.

One recent contribution to the subject from abroad, Michael Pearson's *Merchants and Rulers of Gujarat, Response to the Portuguese in the 16th Century* (New Delhi, 1976), has shown us how much can be done in Indian maritime history even with Portuguese sources. I should add that Pearson handles Persian sources as does Susil Chaudhuri, but in both cases it is the European documentation which is the mainstay. Pearson's major contribution is in making us aware of the structure of India's maritime society. He distinguishes carefully between the state and the merchant, and between the coastal aristocracy and the aristocracy of the Gujarat court. For a long time we have been used to thinking in terms of 'the Portuguese' confronting 'India' but in reality matters were quite different. Different kinds of Portuguese had different interests, as was the case with the various types of Indians. Once more, as with the discussion about the fall of the Mughal empire, we are moving from personalities and politics understood in terms of men like Vasco de Gama, to an appreciation of the structure within which such men played their role.

It is with questions of this kind in mind that I have been looking now for several years at some of the Indian port-cities of the 18th century. In the recent past I have found the Dutch documentation about the city of Surat greatly rewarding. With that and the supporting evidence provided by the English both at an official and unofficial level, with some slight help from the *Mirat i Ahmadi* and the documents of the French East India Company, it has been possible to put together a fairly detailed picture of the mercantile communities of Surat during the first half of the 18th century. The thing I find most interesting is that the Indian merchants were seldom united in their interests and their inclinations, although they maintained an impressive structure of co-operation for centuries. With the merchants of Surat as with the Mughal *mansabdars* discussed by Professor Satish Chandra, what one confronts is extended families and networks of relations and friends. Merchants were divided in groups and they acted as groups, not simply as merchants. Put differently, there was no such groups as the 'the merchants of Surat,' rather there were the 'the Bhora *jamat* of Patan' or 'the Parak family.' No understanding of the historical

processes involved will ever be possible without a recognition of this basic fact of life.

There was a time when we tried to understand the Indian maritime world in terms of the operations of the European states and the European Companies. I shall not say that we have left this phase behind, but the awareness of the structure of the maritime society is now strongly upon us and our questions are shaping accordingly. This, as I have throughout maintained, is in keeping with the general drift in Indian historical research towards seeking structural explanations. With maritime history, however, the basic ignorance of the researcher is felt more keenly than in other areas. In political and agrarian histories there are central structures one can handle and the data can be arranged and explored in terms of over-arching imperial systems. Indian documentation in these fields, though seldom adequate, is however usually available in some abundance. The maritime historian has no option but to go round the Indian coasts, studying each major port-city as it comes, and hope for integration to emerge out of this process itself. Local history therefore is vital to this field of enquiry. To this is added a passionate search for local documentation which has so far produced only insignificant material. The questions are remarkably wide. One has to look for family-histories, written and oral; one examines old temples as they are found, and one looks for men who still build boats along the Indian coasts. Maritime language provides a strong focus of interest and the historian is lost between competing claims of anthropology and linguistics. The future of historical research lies, to my mind, in the proper development of investigations like these. We shall move in this direction not because we have the choice and we are exercising it, but because no adequate explanation of the kind of phenomena we are now investigating can conceivably emerge in any other way.

It is at points like these that the quest of the Indian historian merges with the broad international endeavour in which all historians are interested. As is well-known, the invasion of the historical fields of investigation by the social sciences has been the most outstanding development for us in the recent past. To some extent this has been overdone and there has been agonising doubt. But the merging of history and the social sciences has proceeded at a pace when one no longer quite knows the boundaries any more. It was in 1929 that Lucien Febvre writing editorially in the first issue of the

*Annales* denounced isolated research whether pursued by historians or sociologists, anthropologists or economists. Everywhere but particularly in the European continent and America the call has found enthusiastic response and the *Annales*-school itself has gone on to produce some immortal work. Not all of it has met with approval. That great dissenter, Richard Cobb, has written: "No one would deny that the Masters (Febvre, Bloch and Braudel) [were great pioneers who, even when they were wrong, were wrong intelligently and inspiringly. Their disciples on the other hand. . . . have tended to be imitative, amplifying and fossilizing the Masters' Voice and when they have been wrong they have often been just plain silly]" ('Nous des Annales', in *A Second Identity*, London, 1969).

But the discussion and the research have tended more and more in the same direction. One rather unlooked for disadvantage for many historians has been that they have found themselves excluded from the rapidly growing technical expertise in the new fields. It is possible that the new emphasis on social history as distinct from many another technical development in historical studies is really an effort to keep general interest alive for the historians. In this context it is important to note the recent comments of Professor E.J. Hobsbawm. "Neither the subject itself," he writes of social history, "nor the discussion of its problem developed seriously before 1950. The journals specializing in it, still few in number, were not founded until the end of 1950s: we may perhaps regard the *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1958) as the first. As an academic specialization, social history is therefore quite new.

"What explains the rapid development and growing emancipation of social history in the past twenty years? The question could be answered in terms of technical and institutional changes within the academic disciplines of social science: the deliberate specialization of economic history to fit in with the requirements of the rapidly developing economic theory and analysis, of which the 'new economic history' is an example; the remarkable and worldwide growth of sociology as an academic subject and fashion, which in turn called for subsidiary historical service—branches analogous to those required by economics departments. We cannot neglect such factors. Many historians (such as Marxists) who had previously labelled themselves economic because the problems they were interested in were plainly not encouraged or even considered by orthodox general history, found themselves extruded from a rapidly narrowing econo-

mic history and accepted and welcomed the title of 'social historians,' especially if their mathematics were poor." (From "Social History to the History of Society," in M.W. Flin and T.C. Smout eds., *Essays in Social History*, Clarendon, 1974.)

The fact that many Marxist historians have reacted against the excessive application of social sciences in fields of historical enquiry is of considerable significance. This controversy came to an interesting head last year at San Francisco when at the XIV International Congress of Historical Sciences, Academician A.I. Danilov and others from the Soviet Union questioned the tendency of what they called dissolving history into its social science components among some of the western historians. The Russian position was that history was a synthetic discipline and the aim of the historian was to explain social development in general, and not to see things in their fragments. Unfortunately the discussion was badly side-tracked at San Francisco by the issue of intellectual freedom in the Soviet Union. But the Soviet question gave food for thought for those Indian historians who were present.

The question is of vital importance for us in the coming years. As I see it, Indian history has emancipated itself from the early preoccupations with politics understood in terms of the individual actors and is moving towards an exploration of the structure within which the individuals acted. Local studies necessary for any enquiry of the kind will be available in the years to come. We shall be obliged to move in the direction of the sister-disciplines of history because without them no adequate answer to the problems we are now examining can be formulated. From the western experience, however, we know that a natural tendency will be there to take social science techniques to their extreme, even at the expense of genuine historical interest. Fortunately for us we can learn from what has happened elsewhere and at least enjoy the benefits of the late-comer in any field of investigation.



## Report

The symposium of 23, October 1976 on "The Future of Historical Research in India" was followed the next day by a colloquium of research guides from various parts of the country, who critically examined and analysed the contemporary trends in research in Indian history. They also made some concrete recommendations, to further the cause of national and regional historical studies.

Research in Indian political history, in the form of the history of rulers, it was pointed out, was almost exhausted. The trend of modern researchers to turn from the history of individuals to an examination of the social structures within which these individuals functioned is, therefore, a welcome one. But it is difficult to make a clear and rigid demarcation between the two, because there is a dynamic relationship between them. Besides, unless social and economic history is written within its political and chronological framework, it will appear to be only a minor branch of sociology or of economics. With these reservations, the house agreed that research in social and economic history is a welcome trend.

The house then turned from the general to the specific. The discussion pivoted around Left history. On this point, the historians of the traditional type were very articulate. It was pointed out that in India there were many Left historians, but little Left history. It would have been desirable constructively to examine the why of this situation. In India research in Left history is a relatively recent trend. The Left historians in India, with their high sense of commitment to ideology, should produce adequate research and publications. Can a Marxist historian deal with his discipline with scientific objectivity unrelated to his milieu? Is he not expected to relate his work to the dynamics of dialectical materialism which he believes controls the process of history? A Marxist historian is expected to wage a war against what he considers to be the decadent, obscurantist and irrational ideologies of his epoch. He must struggle against all methods which condemn working people to be passive

onlookers of their destiny. A section of the seminar expressed the fear that this attitude of the Marxist historians would result in research loaded with Marxist values and with a class-struggle appeal.

The guides expressed their appreciation of the work of the Indian Council of Historical Research, in the collection and publication of source material on national and regional history. It was suggested that the work of collection and publication of regional sources should be conducted at the regional level. The Indian Council of Historical Research, which has ample resources, should maintain regional branches for the collection of regional sources. If it does so, the various local archives and the locally situated family and personal collections of documents will be more effectively used.

*Cynthia Deshmukh*  
Bhavan's College, Bombay

## Comments

*On the paper of Dr. K.S. Lal*

In the first part of his learned paper Prof. K.S. Lal has reviewed the origin, development and contribution to historical research of three national organisations, namely, the Indian Historical Records Commission (IHRC), the Indian History Congress (IHC), and the newly set up Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR).

The aims and objectives of these three organisations are different, but they complement one another. The IHRC, through its annual sessions, tries to bring to the notice of scholars new source material available, and also encourages them to present research articles based entirely on original material hitherto unknown. Prof. Lal describes the services which the IHRC is rendering to research scholars, and also points out its limitations and drawbacks. However, he has not mentioned the valuable source material in the form of correspondence, records, travel accounts, catalogues, etc. published by this national organisation. For instance, the volumes of the Calendar of Persian Correspondence, the Fort William Correspondence, Records in Indian Languages, Travel accounts of Carré and thevenot, etc. are very useful to students of history.

The IHC provides a platform for the budding research scholars who aspire to become historians of India. They get an opportunity to present their papers, get them examined by reputed scholars in the field, defend their own findings, and revise their opinions in the light of the discussions in the sectional meetings. The research value of the proceedings of the IHC may not be uniformly good, but it cannot be denied that some material published therein serves as a good reference work particularly for regional histories. Prof. Lal has mentioned the efforts which this organisation is making towards the publication of a comprehensive history of India in several volumes.

The ICHR is an agency set up by the Government of India in 1972 under the auspices of the Ministry of Education to provide financial assistance to research scholars in their individual research

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projects. Prof. Lal has listed the objectives of this national organisation and made a cursory review of its manifold activities. It would have been better if he had given a brief account of the actual implementation of these objects and also commented on its research projects.

The main purpose of the ICHR is to involve young scholars in some fruitful research activity by sanctioning their research projects or awarding fellowships. The number of research projects sanctioned by the Council is quite large—about 143—and they cover many aspects of history—economic (17), social (14), socio-economic-cultural (13), history of political thought and movements (25), political history (16), etc. The Council attaches much importance to the compilation, editing and translation of original source material, and has approved 23 such proposals so far. The younger generation is interested in the Freedom Movement, and a number of research proposals submitted to the Council relate to this, particularly to the popular uprisings in different areas. The Council is very interested in promoting studies in local or regional histories which would ultimately help to get a broad and total perspective of Indian history. Space does not permit us to give an account of the translation programme, the reprints programme, the publication of source material, etc.

The Council is an all-India body, but the response to its various schemes from all the parts of India is not quite satisfactory. If research scholars take the activities of the ICHR seriously, the future of historical research in India will be bright.

Prof. Lal has expressed some people's fear that the research sponsored by the Council might be "value-loaded, if not openly propagandist" and that it might influence the minds of young historians through its large funds. Prof. Lal himself does not attach any importance to these allegations. But some believe that the ICHR has huge funds and that it is distributing patronage indiscriminately. If one studies the budget of the ICHR as well as the proceedings of the Research Projects Committee, one will not believe such charges.

In the latter half of the paper Prof. Lal discusses the new trends in historical writings. About 'Left History' he says that there are many Left historians in India but little Left history. He accepts the necessity of Left history on theoretical grounds so long as it does not degenerate into propaganda. I think Irfan Habib, Bipin Chandra, D.D. Kosambi, A.R. Desai and others have produced

good works through the Marxist approach.

Nowadays there is a great tendency to de-emphasise the political and underline the socio-economic aspect of history. Prof. Lal points out that this tendency is not an innovation. But it must be admitted that there is a greater need in India now to devote more attention to these aspects of history, as the framework of political history of India is more or less complete. Western scholars have made significant advances in the treatment of economic history, and new models, tools and techniques have been introduced in this field. We should certainly make an attempt to acquaint ourselves with modern techniques of historical research. One could agree with Prof. Lal that political history cannot be ignored altogether. But as the outline of political history is fairly well-known, one could add a few more details, or confirm the old facts by digging into the archives. Modern scholars, therefore, naturally tend to scrutinize those fields of historical research which have not been explored sufficiently.

It is very difficult to agree with Prof. Lal when he says that the source material for social and economic history is "limited though not scarce." If one could ransack the State Archives, private collections, literary sources, travelogues, etc., one could get abundant source material for such histories.

Prof. Lal has raised pertinent questions regarding the association of sister disciplines with history. One would certainly agree with him that history should maintain its individuality and, while seeking the help of other disciplines, should not permit itself to be dominated by them.

Quantification in history is possible if one can get continuous and reliable data. For instance, if one wants to work on the trade of the East India Company, one has to employ modern techniques. Graphs, tables and charts used in such histories would be more eloquent than long passages of description. Of course, no method should be carried to a ridiculous extreme, and make the whole thing unintelligible to the reader. The purpose of research is to make the common man aware of his historical past in as simple terms as one can. History is not written for the sake of method, but for understanding by the common man. Research scholars, as E.H. Carr has put it, may embrace different ideologies, but their "purpose in studying History is to understand it." Prof. Lal concludes that the three national organisations are helping spread this understanding.

He has expressed high hopes in the unique role the ICHR might play in the development of historical research in India.

Prof. Lal deserves congratulations for this paper on our national organisations. One gets the impression that he is quite optimistic about the future of historical research in India in view of the services these national organizations render. The colloquium may consider the following points in the light of Prof. Lal's paper: (1) What role should national organisations play in promoting historical research? (2) To what extent are sister disciplines useful for historical research? (3) Which aspects of history should be emphasised in the future?

*A.R. Kulkarni*  
University of Poona

*On the paper of Dr. V.M. Reddi*

1. Dr. Reddi's approach is pragmatic and constructive. He carefully analyses the factors responsible for the far from satisfactory progress in the quality of research done at our universities and suggests remedies for improvement.

2. He has spoken about students unwanted by society, many of whom lack basic knowledge of methodology and of techniques, and of the social sciences—these statements are true, but not universal. In our own university, we use maps and the study of maps is compulsory even at the graduate level. Philosophy of History and Practice of History are taught at the M.A. We employ new methods: discussions, tests, assignments, intensive study of sources. We have to admit that much depends on the quality of teachers and students.

3. The problem of English vs. the regional language is a real problem in one sense; but if we take a careful and realistic view of the research situation, it is no problem: (a) Source material: of the sources, the indigenous, local source for regional history is basic. If we desire to promote regional studies, regional languages must be properly developed and utilised. Sources in other languages cannot be ignored. They have to be studied in co-operative teams. Inter-departmental and inter-university exchanges and co-operation have to be more vigorously practised. (b) Theses must be written in the regional language only, because the sources are in that language. The problem of a competent examiner is a false problem. The real problem is: how can this research reach scholars outside the region? The only remedy is that each regional university bring

out periodically a report on the research work done, and detailed information or even material be supplied to those who need it. (Reference may be made to the publication—*Historiography in Indian Languages*).

4. The suggestion that there should be more centres of regional sources is most helpful and should be implemented in all regions without any delay. So also is the suggestion re: regional history based on regional sources. This also should be pursued by all universities without any delay.

5. The combination of a good researcher and a good teacher is an ideal but not a very practicable or very wise goal. Teaching as well as research are full-time jobs. A good teacher has to keep himself in close and constant contact with the steadily growing literature in his field of specialization. Further, teachers in colleges have heavy loads of teaching work and they have a number of social and cultural obligations in the colleges themselves. Research is an obsession, leaving no time for anything else. Teaching demands varied interest. It is therefore necessary to recognize the value of good teaching. There are two distinct categories—teachers and researchers, but there must be easy devices of close contact between the two.

6. Finally, research is a means to acquire more and more information and more accurate, clearer and more purposeful understanding of history. It is not an end in itself. Its objectives are bound to be those of history, i.e. relating to the discipline, to the nation and to humanity.

*C.M. Kulkarni*

University of Bombay

*On the papers of Dr. A. Das Gupta and Dr. L. Varadarajan*

Dr. Das Gupta's paper is an attempt to elaborate three interrelated themes: (1) Indian historians have gradually moved away from narrative history built around the political fortunes of selected individuals, towards an examination of the structure within which the individuals have functioned; (2) The study of regional and local history; (3) Increasing interest taken by foreign scholars in the history of India.

The early British pioneers of Indian history wrote history in one form which was predominantly in character and in one mode, the narrative. This was because: (1) They found ready-made historical evidence in the Indo-Muslim chronicles; (2) Of the influence of

contemporary British historiography; (3) Of British imperial pride and complacency about the blessings of British rule; (4) Many of the British pioneers were primarily officials and not academicians, and they approached the problems of Indian history from the administrative point of view.

This had a baneful effect on historiography because: (1) It delayed the penetration into Indian historiography of "wider concepts of the nature and scope of history"; (2) It utilised mainly one form of literary evidence, without reference to the socio-religious aspects, Indo-Muslim religious observances, or archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic materials.

Meanwhile, Indian historical scholarship, inspired by the principles of 19th century European historiography, was slowly but steadily growing up during the age of British dominance in historiography, as a reaction against it. As a matter of fact, Indian historiography came to challenge British historiography with the latter's own weapon towards the end of the 19th century: a revolt against the accepted British historians of India started in Maharashtra and Bengal, the earlier and best products of this movement were Rajwade (1864-1926) and Sir Jadunath Sarkar (1870-1958). Sarkar applied the critical and scientific methodology of Ranke and Mommsen to Indian history, and could only cover 150 years of its history in 50 years. His historical works were models of exact scholarship, impartiality and critical acumen, and were examples of "honest history," an epithet applied by V.A. Smith to his *Aurangzib*. His *Shivaji* (1919) was acclaimed by Beveridge as "the best" of his books. While portraying Shivaji as a ray of hope for Hinduism, he did not magnify national history, i.e. he did not confuse the virtue of patriotism with the science of history.

With the lapse of time Sarkar's conception of history underwent a slow but silent transformation. In 1957 he distinguished between two types of research: (1) the General type, an exhaustive study of a king or general; and (2) "Studies of the supreme type" (comparable to Bryce's *Holy Roman Empire*) "have not been produced in India as yet," as he wrote. But he had the supreme satisfaction of a patriarch to witness in his lifetime a change, and advised the young research workers to write on the philosophy of history as in his last inspiring message. Dr. Das Gupta emphasised that Indian history could be studied extensively only if more stress was laid on social and economic history. Z. Faruki (*Aurangzib and His Times*,



1935) is an apologist for Aurangzib against Sir J.N. Sarkar's interpretation of his intolerance, and asserts that the anti-Hindu policy of his hero was due to political and not religious causes.

The first half of the 20th century was also a period of great political struggle and turmoil in India, characterised by a two-fold effort to achieve India's independence from British domination through Hindu-Muslim unity, and also to save the freedom of the Muslims from possible Hindu domination. The political circumstances of the age seem to have cast their shadow over historical writings on medieval India.

The last forty years or so have witnessed a major change in the direction and methodology of medieval Indian historiography, i.e. an increasing interest in socio-economic, religious and cultural history of medieval India. That history is no longer to be confined to political history—story of kings and wars—but has to be a story of the people as well, has now become an axiom. But the conception has not grown all on a sudden as Dr. Das Gupta has stated.

The interest in the study of socio-religious aspects of Medieval India, the growth of which is very much posterior to that in political history or biographical studies, may be of two kinds: (1) exclusive study of socio-religious subjects; (2) interlinking of such studies with political aspects. Of these again, the latter is a more fruitful tendency but it has not developed completely. True, the idea the society is an organic unit was known to Arab historians, especially Khaldun. But history came to be regarded by medieval Muslim historians as something emanating from divine inspiration or flowing from the throne.

*Aligarh Studies in Medieval India:* Aligarh is pursuing the study of medieval Indian history steadfastly. Mention must be made of the *Medieval Indian Quarterly* and the different books published under the Aligarh University series and the studies on "Sufi Saints." Certain tendencies in Aligarh Studies point to Marxist influences. The revised edition of Elliot and Dowson's Vol. II by Profs. Habib and Nizami contains a long introduction on Dialectical Materialism and the materialistic interpretation of history. In his recent outstanding book Dr. Irfan Habib writes in the preface that he has undertaken this study in the belief that "a classification of the problems of agrarian history would generally help in improving our understanding of the general, specially political, history of the period." He concludes that the Mughal Empire was destroyed by an

agrarian crisis.

The student of medieval Indian history has got to be a student of world history and a linguist. He must be conversant with at least Persian and English and, if possible, with Dutch, Portuguese and French, besides the regional languages of different areas of India where necessary. The character of modern Indian historiography on medieval India has now largely changed, from being exclusively "political," it is assuming a "social," or "sociological" colour. It remains to be seen whether it can steer clear of an un-academic outlook of communal considerations or of interpreting history in a particular way.

In his *History of Aurangzib*, like the British historians, Sir Jadunath's conception of history was limited, as is evident from the fact that he confined himself merely to political and military history of medieval India. His too great reliance upon Persian sources and his orthodoxy about the same may appear to others as no better methodology than what was adopted by the Muslim chroniclers of the medieval period with an urban outlook.

*Local History*: This may be distinguished from *Local Studies*. Local History can be useful to the national historians. Sure and accurate details about one locality can help build up a national picture. Agricultural or social changes in one village may give a hint of trends in the whole country. The duties of a local historian are to find out as much as possible about everything that has made his locality what it is now.

Dr. Das Gupta then swiftly came to the present study of Indian nationalism and the new light cast by the Cambridge group which scoffed at the very idea of Indian nationalism. Perhaps he is not aware of the following publications:

(1) Christine Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India, Politics and Communities in Bombay City (1840-1885)*.

(2) T.C. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations in 19th century Western India (1867-1895)*.

Bombay City provides an exciting case-study in one of the main themes of modern Indian history, the speed and variability with which different communities in the Indian sub-continent espoused the new opportunities and new ideas which were the concomitant of foreign rule. In particular, the question arises whether the possibilities for trade and commerce furnished by the city in the 19th century led to the rise a new class of commercial magnates; whether

the British educational endeavour produced a new elite of learning, or whether both the merchant pioneers and the English-educated intelligentsia of the city were linked to the traditional commercial and intellectual elite of the area. One might further ask if Bombay's commercial and intellectual leadership was in any way interrelated, and investigate how the leadership responded to the opportunities for political and social combination provided by the city.

Dr. Das Gupta pointed out the need for an intensive research on the maritime heritage of the country and mentioned anthropology and linguistics as essential for the study of maritime history. Dr. K.V. Hariharan's thesis on *Seafaring in India in the Proto-Historic Period* may be mentioned as an outstanding work in this field. If Dr. Das Gupta could have highlighted the major sources for the study of maritime history, that would have been extremely helpful.

Dr. (Mrs.) L. Varadarajan stressed the need for the use of myths, folklore, the plastic and performing arts and other activities of traditional India for a better understanding of India's past. She realized the need to look at history from the viewpoint of modern nationalism. But there was the danger of historical evidence being falsified, for therein lies the distinction between history and propaganda. Dr. Varadarajan mentioned oral tradition as a neglected aspect in studying Indian history and said that the Nehru Museum's methods in this direction should be studied closely for practical results. However, she has not discussed the means and agencies for collecting oral traditions. How far are they reliable? And the means of testing their authenticity are not outlined by Dr. Varadarajan.

Dr. Varadarajan also pointed out the dark spots in Indian history and chose examples with care to show that areas of special study like "Maritime History" would give important clues to the expansion of Indian nationalism in South-East Asia. She has referred to the class of administrative historians in British India. It may be mentioned that they are still to be found in India. Dr. Varadarajan has analysed the problems facing the 'private researcher' in the country and emphasised the need to give financial support to the serious research workers as "self-supporting historians are no longer possible." While agreeing with her on this point, it is gratifying to note that today a number of scholarships are available through different agencies like the UGC, ICHR and various centres for advanced learning. Dr. Varadarajan has pointed out the need for the accountability of the independent research worker "but the

yardsticks used have to be suitably devised in order to draw forth the best results."

Dr. Das Gupta and Dr. (Mrs.) Varadarajan traced the new direction being taken by Indian history. We are grateful to these scholars for drawing our attention to the problems of research in Indian History.

*A. Cherian*  
Wilson College, Bombay



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