

MEANING AND NATURE OF HISTORY- PART 1

(PG SEM-1, CC:1, HISTORIOGRAPHY)

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INTRODUCTION

History is the *study of life in society in the past*, in all its aspect, in relation to present developments and future hopes. It is the story of man in time, an inquiry into the past based on evidence. Indeed, evidence is the raw material of history teaching and learning. It is an Inquiry into what happened in the past, when it happened, and how it happened. It is an inquiry into the inevitable changes in human affairs in the past and the ways these changes affect, influence or determine the patterns of life in the society. History is, or should be an attempt to re-think the past. *Collingwood (1945)* is particularly interested in this concept of history. History aims at helping students to understand the present existing social, political, religious and economic conditions of the people.



INTRODUCTION

Without the knowledge of history we cannot have the background of our religion, customs institutions, administration and so on. The teaching of history helps the students to explain the present, to analyze it and to trace its course. *Cause and-effect relationship between the past and the present is lively presented in the history.* History thus helps us to understand the present day problems both at the national and international level accurately and objectively. In this unit we will be dealing with meaning, and nature of history.



CONCEPT OF HISTORY

History is the analysis and interpretation of the human past enabling us to study continuity and changes that are taking place over time. It is an act of both investigation and imagination that seeks to explain how people have changed over time. Historians use all forms of evidence to examine, interpret, revisit, and reinterpret the past. These include not just written documents, but also oral communication and objects such as buildings, artifacts, photographs, and paintings. Historians are trained in the methods of discovering and evaluating these sources and the challenging task of making historical sense out of them.



CONCEPT OF HISTORY

History is a means to understand the past and present. The different interpretations of the past allow us to see the present differently and therefore imagine—and work towards—different futures. It is often said to be the “*queen*” or “*mother*” of the social sciences. It is the basis of all subjects of study which fall under the category of Humanities and Social Sciences. It is also the basis of the study of philosophy, politics, economics and even art and religion. No wonder, it is considered an indispensable subject in the complete education of man.

MEANING OF HISTORY

The origin of the word History is associated with the Greek word '*Historia*' which means '*information*' or '*an enquiry designed to elicit truth*'.

- Till the 19th century the historians mainly themselves with facts and were indifferent to the philosophy of history. It was only in 1880's and 1890's that the primacy of facts in history was challenged and philosophy of history was advocated by certain German philosophers, of whom Dilthey is the most popular one.
- In 20th century Croce of Italy propounded the thesis that history consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of its problems, and the main job of the historian was not to record but to evaluate. He held that unless the historian evaluated he could not determine what was worth recording. He greatly influenced the famous Oxford philosopher and historian Collingwood.

MEANING OF HISTORY

- According to E.H.Carr “ History consists of a corpus of ascertainable facts. The facts are available to the historian in documents , inscriptions and so on like fish on the fish monger’s slab. The historian collects them, takes them home , and cooks and serves them in whatever styles appeals to him.” For him “ history is an unending dialogue between the present and the past and the chief function of the historian is to master and understand the past as a key to the understanding of the present.”
- According to Prof. Elton history is “concerned with all those human sayings, thoughts, deeds and sufferings which occurred in the past and have left present deposit; and it deals with them from the point of view of happening change and the particular.



MEANING OF HISTORY

- Sir Charles Firth described history as “ the record of the life of the societies of the men, of the changes which these societies have gone through, of the ideas which have determined the actions of those societies and of the material conditions which have helped or hindered their development.
- Lord Acton defined history as the ‘unfolding story of human freedom’.
- Prof. A.L. Rowse has said : “History is essentially the record of life of men in societies in their geographical and their physical environments. Their social, and cultural environments arises from the interaction of the one with the other, the society and its geographical conditions.”



DEFINING HISTORY

History has been defined differently by different scholars. Following other definitions indicate the meaning and scope of History.

- Burckhardt: “History is the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another.”
- Henry Johnson: “History, in its broadest sense, is everything that ever happened.”
- Smith, V.S: “The value and interest of history depend largely on the degree in which the present is illuminated by the past.”
- Rapson: “History is a connected account of the course of events or progress of ideas.”



DEFINING HISTORY

- **NCERT:** “History is the scientific study of past happenings in all their aspects, in the life of a social group, in the light of present happenings.”
- **Jawaharlal Nehru:** “History is the story of Man’s struggle through the ages against Nature and the elements; against wild beasts and the jungle and some of his own kind who have tried to keep him down and to exploit him for their own benefit.”

The above definitions explain History as a significant records of events of the past, a meaningful story of mankind depicting the details of what happened to man and why it happened. *Mainly it deals with the human world. (To be continued)*