

Knowledge in History

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This is a bipisteme world wherein each society is looking into the substance with its own vision. Knowledge is a polymorphic term. The term is failing to answer whether it is concerned with sense experience (finite) or supersense experience (infinite). To an inquisitive mind, all discovered facts and efforts are either repetition of the earlier accomplishment or confirmation of the establishment. Are we not subjecting ourselves to frequentative investigation (Re plus search). The *Science* thrives at discovering laws of nature and *Humanities* on achieving the mind behind the action. Are they pursuing the common goal or heading towards different poles. The knowledge derived thus looks superficial rather actual and also it stands "divisible" against the objective of indivisibility which should be its guiding principle. Efforts at discovering the fact through the process called "research" with our investigators is thus "Nominalism" of the medieval thinkers as against "Realism" of the Greeks'.

Exponents of mundance matter theory negate all that ordained affairs men advocate, as a priori, because it does not fall in their sense perception (acquisitional) while those in the conceptual domain (revelational) urge for knowledge beyond visibly physical postures of an object to real invisible, the prime mover behind all actions.

We live in a secular world and all modern knowledge is based on secular drive. The guiding spirit in secular knowledge is determining a perceptual identification of cause and effect of the occurring on the planet of the earth and the society effected by it. It therefore goes for finding out the laws or explanation governing the universe, both in matter and man. Modern knowledge is equating the two items. While there are laws governing the matter, both animate and inanimate they fail to find similar

operation in Man. The researchers therefore falter when they postulate laws governing the man and his made society. Hegel, Herder and Marx therefore in their efforts conditioned man to pass through stages, advocating philosophy of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, gave their own meanings to history and thus brought an element of generalisation in the man made institutions. Hobb, Locke, Rousseau similarly had advocated this generalisation when talked about the social contract theory. The Russian Unilinealists (Yuri Semenov etc.) stressed human society passing through primitiveness, slavery, feudalism, capitalism followed by communism.

Now this is a shere imposition on history and philosophical inroad into the subject matter of history. What Copernicus, Newton, Galileo and later Einstein discovered in nature, the philosophers laboured to find out with history. The term philosophy of history was coined in the 17th/18th centuries to discover knowledge available in its recorded pages. It was born in Italy, popularised in Germany and flourished in America. The Italian philosopher Vico (1668-1744) probably coined this word, Herder, the German thinker, followed by Hegel, Dilthe and Ricket, wrote intensively about it in Germany and made it a subject of common knowledge.

Germans hold a majority ethnic group in America and education in Germany was a popular urge with early American settlers of German descent who sent their children for education to Germany in the nineteenth century. Thus new knowledge about history entered into American philosophical thought and received new impetus.

Writers on history since recorded period, have been finding "knowledge" in its subject matter. The Greeks Stoics noticed a CYCLE of events in its record. They discovered periods of evolution, progress and regress in the pages of history.

The Romans (Marcus Auretius and Seneca) ratified this viewpoint. They thought that a human society whithers away with the time and each new cycle starts with initial stage of innocence and simplicity. Advancement in art and inventions brings age of luxuries leading to vices and ultimately destruction. Ibn Khaldun amongst the Arab writers held on to some similar views on cyclical theory. Nietzsche in the nineteenth and

Spengler in the twentieth centuries revived the cyclic concept. While Rousseau had in the eighteenth century talked of the deterioration aspect with the advancement of civilisation. Material perfection brings soul corruption which some analysts called corrupting theory of history.

The age of religion in Europe brought forth the concept of PROVIDENTIAL theory, wherein the writers propounded the thought that history tells of the divine hand behind its events. The Jewish, Christian and Muslim writers of the medieval period, invariably adhered to this thought. St. Augustine's "City of God" in the West is the classical example for it. This view prevailed for about a thousand year in the world, till challenged by the humanist writers in the following centuries.

Nineteenth century ushered in the age of reason and rationale. Kant followed by Hegel held the day in expounding theories of thought in history. Reason, both the philosophers emphasised, found meaning in history. Kants "Idea of Universal History" and Hegels' "Philosophy of History" make spirit supreme in human history and they ask for advancement of human spirit, as spirit is reality, the rest all false. Hegel's dialectic movement also finds prominence in this growth process.

Hegel's dialecticism gave birth to the subsequent dialectical materialism theory, that gave international fame to Marx and Engels. Marx considered economics the determining factor in human life. To him history is a record of class conflict. Economic benefits or losses make differences with human life.

Spengler, Schweitzer, Sorokin, Whitehead, Toynbee and Quigly, the twentieth century thinkers used the knowledge from history intensively in propounding their theories on human societies.

Spengler basically an educationalist (Mathematician) studied all major civilisations of the world, and established a hypothetical differentiation between culture and civilisation, the former he assigns to the rising period of a society and the latter to the fall. with Spengler there is no world culture and each society had been pursuing its goals its own way without any universality about them. Albert Schweitzer, a medical doctor, working in an African hospital laid emphasis on the role of "ethics" in his two volumes work on "Philosophy of Civilisation".

History to him is a collection of ethical advancement of man, a process which received considerable setback since nineteenth century when material aspects advanced. Schweitzer notices a process of universality in history, finding the ethics as the cornerstone of the human civilisation.

The Harvard Sociologist P.A. Sorokin, in his four volumes studies of "Social and Cultural Dynamics" divides the human society into three group cultures. One Sensate, which mainly concentrates on material, empirical and utilitarian gains. Two Ideational, a Godly and ascetic society and Three, the Idealistic, the one standing between the two and using both ways for its ends. Sorokin notices a crisis developing in advancement of Sensate culture wherein man is loosing grip over his ambitions and thus loosing himself to crime, sex and wars. Alfred North Whitehead in his two works (i) *Adventure of Ideas* and (ii) *Science and the Modern World*, notices certain important traits in human civilisation. Truth, beauty, adventure, arts and peace form forehead of a civilisation. Freedom of thought and action, toleration and presentation rather than force and coercion make the formulation of its body. Modern society, Whitehead says is led by material considerations ignoring moral, aesthetic and spiritual values..

Toynbee in the 12 volumes "Study of History" examined 21 world civilisations and finds uniformity in their course of action. Challenge, response, action reaction, Ying Yang, withdrawl, return theories and postulates find place in Toynbee work. Rise of a society, he attributes to the role of the creative minority. The chief danger to the man, says Toynbee is man, moral and religious bankruptcy, he says, is resulting in collapse of modern Western society.

Carrol Quigly in "The Evolution of Civilisation" notices, like many of the early writers a universality in human conduct and action. History to him is continuum and every civilisation passes through certain phases. He enumerates seven stages in this regard. Each civilisation creates its own issues and thus withers away, giving birth to new culture which mostly come from outside influence.

Social Scientists we heard about History, let us now examine for a while some of this century's philosopher's opinion about History.

Two Schools of thought emerged amongst the philosophers scanning knowledge from history and dialating upon its benefit. The first and foremost school of thought amongst them was called IDEALIST. This theory originated with Croce and rested with Collingwood. To the Idealists history is a Science (knowledge proper or truth) but of peculiar nature. To history, the Idealist believe, goes the credit of finding out the truth, though of individual and not the general nature, the latter a speciality with science. The subject matter of Science is mostly inanimate, while history deals with animate, basically the man who has been changing with the time and circumstances, therefore formation of a law in his behaviour pattern is difficult. The Idealist also let loose the concept of reliving of thought. Man can relive another man's thought placing himself into the same condition through knowledge of circumstances from the pages of history. Entering nature's thought is not possible. Pain, pleausre, fear, anger, thoughts can be relived.

The other School is called the POSITIVIST, which originated with Comte and assumed different names withe the passage of time like (i) emperiocriticism (ii) logical positivism (iii) logical empericism and finally (iv) analytical and linguistic philosophy.

The positivists, without going into the controversies of its schools, believe that historical events are based on varification, which stems out of human behaviour and therefore it could not be at variance with Science. History has laws, as its conclusion are reached by appeal to general truth. To Comte, followed by Hume and Carl Hempel, history could rise to the level of Science provided it followed the pattern of Science in formulating laws in its narration.

Ideas and speculations spelled above, all come from men and postulators not directly linked with writing of history. The subject matter of history to be precise, involves three elements (i) historian — the man (ii) the art — historiography and (iii) writing — the record.

A practical historian as of necessity is governed by a certain given environment around him. It may be (a) a search for knowledge, (b) a response to a query, (c) a curiosity satisfaction, (d) a commissioned assignment, (e) a personal appreciation, experience or vendata. In each incident the historian is led by the motives pre-determined. The formulation of the problem urges upon him to accumulate data meeting out his viewpoint. Here conciously or unconsciously he has set forth in mind a provisional explanation, or in general terms called hypothesis for the goal in mind. The method employed for writing out the story out of the premises established, involves the art called historiography.

The art of history writing is very old, complex and value loaded. History writing started with myth and legend descriptions. To the Greeks it was a logography, the Ionians made it a search for knowledge. It was under the later Greeks and early Romans that history turned to recording of events and thus it set upon the present Latin terminology of "historia". The rise of Christianity in the West during the medieval period, gave a new dimension and outlook to history writing. The Christian writers brought in its concept the idea of providentiality and interpreted the events of history to terms of data ciphered out in accordance with the need. They also discarded the non-Christian (pagan) data as profane. Arab Muslim historians, followed by their co-religionists Persian, Turkish and others, did follow the Christian tradition in upholding the providential aspect, but they also resorted to literature and scripture from non-Islamic past. The concept of geneology, as with the Greeks, finds prominence with the early Arab historians too. Political and sectarian differences resulting in biased reporting against Ummayad rulers like their Christian predecessors is discernable amongst the Abbaside historians and subsequent Islamic writers.

The Socio-intellectual movement called HUMANISM gushing out of the Seventeenth century Europe is a great divide line in terms of epistemology which changed like many other aspect of man's life the concept of history writing as well. The new writers were mostly secularists, searching for causation and placing the man in the decision making role. Data and information from the rich human history was sorted out and events with their explanations were recorded to accommodate

the popularised sensory perceptual objective of the modern man. The man was out on his experience hunt, divulging even in prohibited cultures. The human values were changing and for that history was obliged to feed the data. Human past is very rich and deeper dive into it, surfaces instances and anecdotes asymmetrical and thus theories and hypotheses even today are established to affirm the postulates of their authors.

The Records of history do carry some meaning too. It is not mere event of a past, a tale of a civilisation, story of a dynasty or romance of an individual. It is in fact an account of man's thought. All human actions are governed by thought. What ever the man has accomplished over the ages on this planet is product of his conscious or otherwise planning and thought of his mind. History in a way determines the agenda for future human achievements. Accomplishment forms the record of man's gain thenceforth.

History also tells us that adherence to virtue sets the goal for advancement both material and moral. It forms the basis of human rationale and fair dealing.

Tyranny, violation of known human rights, discrimination, debauchery, larcency, dishonesty, form part of the vices and result in chaos, disorder and ultimate failure of an individual, dynasty or a society. History as such is a teacher of human values. Any departure from set concept of human values is their violation. The human virtues have been bifurcated by the West, as in other cases, into two groups, (i) justice, (ii) prudence, (iii) temperance and (iv) fortitude belong to the natural form of virtues while the other three are Christian (religious) elements of (v) faith, (vi) hope and (vii) love. *Haquq ullah* and *Huququl Abad* form the essence of the virtues in Islam and incorporate the essential of both the system. One can therefore glean through them the required "laws" that govern rise and fall of a system.

History also tells us of the hidden forces at work which change the course of events beyond or contrary to expectations. There is positive providentiality in history and it has been exhibiting itself all along the course of human past, though the man diverts it to his credit. None of the world socio-political movements nor fall of the civilisations, empires or for that

matter of the individuals has ever been foreseen or predicted in the known records. Man and nations had been hatching adverse plans against their adversaries but falls or gains never come planned way. Each case proceeds its own way in accordance with the given circumstances and in conformity with the laws governing it. Instances can be found many from our recent history. The creation of Pakistan, fall of the monarchy in Iran, end of the Soviet empire, Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan are some of the major events of our part of history which no one anticipated a decade before their occurrences.

History in the olden days formed essential part of the curriculum for the prospecting man-managers. Historians were engaged at the royal courts, seminaries and academies to teach future rulers in art of governing and conducting human affairs. The subject has lost its efficacy as man building has been substituted by machine building under thrust of the scientific advancement.

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