

Pathways to Development of Hindu Historiography

Call for Papers

Seminar

“Writing History from a Hindu Point of View”

The Present is the living sum-total of the whole Past. ~Thomas Carlyle, *Characteristics*

Background

Most of the history of Hindus and Hinduism has not been written from a Hindu point of view. Several philosophers and prominent academicians have pointed out this lacuna and authored scholarly papers on the subject. Their observations and theses have been matched by some efforts in the academia. Development of Hindu Historiography in the Academia is expected to run its full course, as the principal participants in this endeavor grapple with the systemic challenges that they are expected to run into. Some of these challenges include, but are not limited to, inter alia, politicization of academic history writing, “heritage” of colonial interest, lack of support for out of box thinking from academic leadership and lack of qualified human resources. There might even be a bigger obstacle in the academia towards proper development of a Hindu School of History, viz. the current structural framework and the academic process of history writing may not have the adequate philosophical capacity to capture the complexity and nuances of the Hindu historical experience.

Issues

The current academic framework for study of any subject in general, and human sciences in particular, is heavily influenced by the Western worldview, which however valid, is one incomplete point of view among many. This framework is intrinsically incapacitated to record the full range of consequences in other equally important human dimensions – emotional collective, cultural or spiritual. e.g. this worldview has the tendency to see historical events only in terms of physical and material loss or gain – be that of territory or wealth. It has a strong tendency to approach history from a west centered perspective, where history writing is biased towards how it fits into the western narrative. In fact, the western outlook of their history that has evolved through the experience of the west has become a paradigm that is seen to apply to the rest of the world verbatim. Thus making conquest and conflict that have impacted history to a lesser degree more defining historical milestones than the generation and dissemination of ideas that have actually altered the course of history more. Events that have not had political or economic impact have largely been neglected or overlooked, even though they have had profound impact on the course of history in cultural, behavioral, less obvious or slow to evolve ways. Due to this lacunae in its approach, the western academic framework falls short of adequately enumerating and expressing, inter alia, losses of a tradition, an assault on culture, and compromise in spirituality. Some examples that demonstrates the current academic

inadequacy are (but not limited to): nature of civilizational interaction being one of conflict and application of that model to others' history and to current and future world events (whereas many other modes of interactions have occurred and do occur), describing Kama Sutra as a "sex manual" (where it is a quintessential book of Hindu spirituality), describing Buddha as a "rebel" against "Brahmanical orthodoxy" (whereas Buddha considered himself as one among a long line of the Vedic masters that preceded him and pays rich tributes to them), completely disregarding the spiritual dimension of Tantra ritualism (for western view it is nothing more than sexual pleasure), seeing Sita's agni pariksha as an instrument of oppression against women (whereas Sita was simply suo moto upholding her Dharma of her times), destruction of temples as a loss of only wealth and stone (but to a Hindu, a murti of Devi or Devata is much more than a stone), misinterpreting jaati and varna on the lines of European serfdom (and completely disregarding the colonial impact of unnatural hardening of caste lines in modern times).

The obfuscation caused by this inadequate representation of Hindu history within the western academic framework has led to disastrous consequences in both, a generation of a sense of self-deprecation among English-speaking Hindu elites who engage in self-mutilating negationism, and equally a small minority of hot-headed Hindu activists whose gut reaction is expressed in an inarticulate and sometimes comical, but more importantly, ineffectual ways - highlighted by street protests, demands for book banning and court cases, but nevertheless must be understood as a basic human reaction to centuries of intellectual disenfranchisement. Until the intellectual community rises to meet the challenge in an intellectual plane, instilling a sense of fairness and confidence in the Hindu community, the hardened positions will continue on the streets.

It can be safely concluded that unless and until western-dominated academic framework for historiography is transitioned to accommodate the multi-dimensional nature of human historical experiences world over based on recognition of integral nature of human existence, writing History in mainstream academia from a Hindu perspective would be akin to putting the cart before the horse. It is nevertheless expected and hoped that leadership in academia will rise to the occasion and expand the extant framework to eventually allow a genuine development of Hindu historiography.

Opportunity and Purpose

Today is essentially a continuation of yesterday. History is the one field of study and expression that has a full range and depth of far-reaching consequences and impact in contemporary affairs of any society. There is a large corpus of history-related work that is expressed in popular writing. Popular history has immense impact in domestic and international politics, a community's sense of identity and social relations. History is truly a frontline field of study that has a direct impact on the society and its future. The work of development of a Hindu School of History could be initiated outside and independent of conventional academia, while formal academics modifies its framework to fill the lacunae and catches up to speed. At some point the two parallel threads can meet and mutually validate and self-correct their respective outputs.

It is the unorthodox or independent sector of history writing that is the purpose of this endeavor.

Goal

The goal of this effort is to formulate the basis of history writing from a Hindu perspective in the unorthodox or independent popular sector.

Objectives

The current seminar is one of the several that will be organized to present, discuss, debate and then formulate the basis of Hindu historiography. The scholars and thinkers can start by taking any area or time-frame in history, detecting the fault line or lacunae from a Hindu point of view, diagnosing the root cause, proposing an alternate point of view, rationalizing it from a Hindu perspective and most importantly extracting the theoretical basis expressed in the form of concise formulae or aphorisms. A paradigm that could be utilized by a student of history and applied to a different historical scenario to derive a similar effect. Ultimately, it is hoped that this collectively will lead to both an enriching of conventional or mainstream history writing as well as contribute in no small measure in the development of a historical narrative that espouses the Hindu or Dharmic outlook in global affairs.

Focus

The focus of the current seminar is recorded history that is verified by scientifically accepted means. The subject of Pauranic Itihasa, for example, is a different subject matter and shall be covered in another session in a suitable setting. The contributors are requested to focus on history as it is understood and expressed in mainstream modern parlance.

Methodology

The methodology used in the seminar will conform to the scientific methods of conventional history writing and analysis currently prevalent in the discipline while being completely independent from it. In fact, the prevalent scientific methodologies applied to hitherto unexplored aspects of even the same widely available historical information is expected to unearth the myriad facets of human experience that conventional historiography has thus far overlooked, dismissed or neglected to sufficiently explore. In the process, it will also develop a method of formalizing and systematizing informal historical paraphernalia such as folk lore, traditional knowledge, legends, rituals, etc., leading to a more holistic understanding of history while strictly adhering to the scientific method. e.g. the personal courage of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi or the poem titled Vande Mataram in a novel by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee that have lasting and ongoing historical impact.

Suggested Areas of Work

Listed herewith are certain scenarios that can be studied and to which aforementioned process can be applied.

- Take the work of any prominent historian, e.g. R.C. Majumdar (secular nationalist), D.D. Kosambi (Marxist), Percival Spear (European), or Al-Beruni (Islamic), and focus on a small slice of time that all of them have written on, then compare and contrast their interpretations of the same slice of time from their respective schools of thought, then diagnose the lacuna from a Hindu point of view, and offer a different and distinct Hindu point of view.
- Take any one of the school of historiography (secular nationalist, or Marxist, or colonial, or Islamic), and offer a critique of their respective framework, and then offer the Hindu alternative.
- Provide rationale for your point of view to be classified as a Hindu point of view.
- Make an attempt to extract your reasoning to a higher level of abstraction and propose a formula for Hindu history writing.
- Then, validate the formula to another event or another school of historiography (e.g. Marxist vs. Annalist) and perform a comparative analysis – the formula must yield consistent results across the spectrum.

Example – how does each non-Hindu school of historiography record the event of temple desecration? Is R.C. Majumdar’s account structurally different from D.D. Kosambi’s? Could R.C. Majumdar’s account be classified as a Hindu perspective – even though his account may not be anti-Hindu? What is the difference in the two positions? Why a secular nationalist historian’s account of murti desecration cannot be classified as a Hindu account? Then, how should it be presented from a Hindu point of view? Justify and then extract the formula. Then, use another instance of history to validate your formula.

The contributors can also take any other area of history writing and present their viewpoint. There are vast areas of opportunity for Hindu history writing, and it is impossible to list all the case studies here.

Submission Guidelines

Contributors will be asked to submit the following:

- Title (one line)
- Abstract (1-2 paras)
- Bio sketch (not to exceed 2-3 paras, please do not send whole CV)
- Photo (passport style front facing)

If bio-sketch and photo are available on the web, then no need to submit.

Once the proposal is admitted, the contributor will be asked to upload the whole paper to a designated website, in addition to send a MS-WORD and a pdf copy of the paper. Also, needed

is a list of three (3) peers, who can review your work in the online system. One of the reviewers could be you.

The contributor must not release his paper prematurely in the public domain. After the conference, the paper will be published on the conference associated website, which then can be quoted and reproduced elsewhere without alteration.

The papers must be followed up by a summary presentation (in a ppt) on the salient points in the paper.

Debate – the contributor can be challenged for a debate, and must agree to one, if a proposal for a challenge is proposed.

Deadlines

For title, abstract, bio sketch, and photo: March 15th, 2014

For papers and ppt: April 24th, 2014

Further Information

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Conference

Global Hindu Conference
April 26th-27th, 2014
San Jose, CA, USA

Details of the conference will be provided separately.

For conference information, please contact:

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