

Reframing Objectivity: Postcolonial Perspectives on Indian History

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ABSTRACT

Objectivity is the specialty of modern scientific knowledge. It means that if a scientist proves it in the laboratory on the basis of proper method and rules, then all the scientists will accept that research. For example, it is universal and eternal rules for certain specific reactions in relation to iron, water, mercury etc. There cannot be different opinions regarding the conclusions related to these things. Most of the historians have accepted history as a science. The concept of historians dedicated to scientific conclusions is that they are continuously trying to make the conclusion of the nature of history universal and for all times. If history is completely accepted as a science, then objectivity is expected in it. But despite the efforts of dedicated historians to prove history as science, the historical conclusions could not become objective. The reason behind this is that history is the account of human achievements. It is not possible for everyone to have same human activities every time. Historical objectivity has its own problems.

Keywords- History, Human Activities, Objective, Speciality.

INTRODUCTION

Objectivity is a very important question in history. But what is objectivity? Objectivity means that the historian should describe the past in a neutral manner, completely unbiased and free of prejudice, without being influenced by his environment, ideology and political supremacy. It is an important question whether the historian can describe the activities of the past with complete impartiality in this way or not? Generally, scholars differentiate between science and history. History is different from physical sciences in the sense that in science, the observer or human doer is separate from the subject of his study, but in human sciences, the doer and the subject matter which this doer studies are of the same category, their nature is similar, that is, the historian himself is a human being and is influenced by his environment and the subject matter of his study is also of the humans of the past. Lives in activities, thoughts or their environment. Historians and humans of the past are one species of beings. Historians do not just study the physical structure of human beings or the internal structure of the body like biological scientists, in which humans will play an important role. Sociologists and historians try to know what people do in a particular environment, what desires motivate them to do so, because their will plays an important role in the forms of human life that they study. Different people choose human desires in different ways.^[1] Different people show different reactions in the same situation, eg. When there is a physical threat, some people act with extreme bravery, some to see how others will react, and some with outright cowardice. We have given a simple example here, but in human life, in complex environments, we can see many forms of reactions. What we mean to say is that in social sciences, there is a special kind of relationship between the observer and the human activities being studied, which is completely different from the natural sciences. Even while studying the past, the historian, due to this specialty of the subject of history, observes any historical event with some of his own viewpoints. Therefore, objectivity means that we write history without any discrimination. There should be no influence of our thinking or any other pressure anywhere in the compilation of history. The historian's accurate and realistic description of the situation is called objectivity.

According to Professor Gary, "Objectivity means that we write history without any discrimination. There should not be our thinking or any other pressure anywhere in the compiling of history. According to W.H. Walsh, "Objectivity is to solve any problem in a manner acceptable to all."

Problems of Historical Objectivity- The problems of historical objectivity are complex and serious. Only after their solution can the efforts of scientific historians related to historical objectivity be recognized.

1. Special viewpoint- The historian portrays the past in the context of a particular perspective, concept, culture, personal jealousy, animosity and misconception. Karl Marx, Spengler, Karl Mannheim have arranged the events of the past from a special viewpoint. Prof. Walsh has clarified that, "History should be studied from a particular point of view." Therefore, if a particular point of view is given priority in the study of history, then the idea of historical objectivity is meaningless.^[2]

2. Era specifics- According to Carl Becker, history is a comprehensive description of past events, but the historian of every era does not present the description of past events in the same way. The historian of each generation writes history according to the needs of his era. Slavery was a social necessity of some era and a social curse in the present. The nature of history has been changing in every era. Therefore, the idea of scientific objectivity in history is a dream.

3. Social being- Man is a social being and is connected to the values. A historian is also born, nurtured and developed in society. His ideology is shaped by his values, religious and political environment. The influence of society, culture and religion on the historian is natural. Therefore, no historian can free himself from these influences. According to Karl Marx, "Historians who believe in the scientific method should find historical objectivity outside the society." This statement of Marx seems to be true. There is strong opposition among many historians due to culture and social environment.^[3]

4. Beliefs- Legends in history were once authentic and acceptable, but now they have become a rationally questioned object of human history. Similarly, the present historical authenticity and accepted facts will definitely be rationally challenged in the future. In such a situation, history cannot be universal and timeless compared to scientific objectivity.

5. Social need- The social need of any era always influences the viewpoint of historians. Edward Meyer has considered contemporary social need to be the main parameter in compiling history. When the great philosopher Crochet called all history contemporary, his intention was to give priority to the contemporary social need in compiling history. Crochet has clearly said, "The soul of man must be constantly sensitive." According to Gardiner, "There is no measure of social need." The usefulness of the same historical fact varies in different times. The nature of interests and vested interests of human life have been changing in every era. It is wrong to expect equality and uniformity in it. The history of one era is different from the history of another era and diversity is inevitable in history.

6. Personal Interest- Historical objectivity is a complex problem. Historical objectivity is an impossible fantasy. Any creation is an expression of the personality of the author. Hazlitt has also accepted this fact and said, "In art, taste, life and speech, the feeling of the person is decisive, not logic. The work of the historian is based on emotion, not logic."

7. Being biased- According to Oakshaw, "It is natural for a historian to be biased." No low caste historian could restrain his sympathetic feelings when describing the oppression of the untouchables and caste system of ancient times. The biased nature of the historian provides the power to understand and properly evaluate the struggle between two classes in the past. In the same way, no historian can abandon his affection and loyalty towards the motherland. Imperialist British historians have called the Indian War of Independence of 1857 a military rebellion, while Indian historians call it the first war of independence."^[4]

8. Difference in selection of facts- The field of historical research is quite vast. Therefore, it is beyond the capacity of the historian to present a comprehensive picture of the past. Usually, the historian describes only one or two aspects of the past. The wide area of the past forces the historian to choose any one or two aspects as per his wish and need of research. Due to being biased, historians give different views. For example, about

the sudden death of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, Dr. Ishwari Prasad has accepted that this was the result of a well-planned conspiracy by Prince Ulugh Khan, but Dr. Mehdi Hasan, while evaluating Ulugh Khan's achievements, has said that Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq died accidentally due to sudden lightning.

9. Effect of Religion and caste- Social identity also create difficulties in historical objectivity. The historian cannot free himself from religious and caste concerns. In medieval Indian history, historians influenced by religion and caste sentiments have tried to distort the facts. Sir Jadunath Sarkar has bitterly criticized Aurangzeb's religious policy and demolition of temples, but Farooqui has justified Aurangzeb's religious policy and demolition of temples.

10. Influence of political parties: People living in civilized society are related to various political ideologies like Marxism, liberals, capitalists, democrats, monarchists, communists etc. Historians are also influenced by the principles of these political parties. He explains historical events from his point of view. It does not seem appropriate to expect objectivity from such historians. Historical objectivity is visibly biased in the works of such historians. ^[5]

11. Historical Justice- According to Madelbaum, "Historical justice is value-oriented." Therefore, it is not possible to accept it as objective. The historian who gives moral judgment about any event or person completely lacks historical objectivity in his history compiling.

Necessity of historical objectivity or ways to achieve it:

It becomes clear after detailed analysis of the problems of historical objectivity, that objectivity in history is a complex problem, but this does not mean that the nature of history cannot be objective. In this regard, some basic questions naturally arise:

1. What kind of objectivity is expected from a historian?
2. Is the exploration of subjectivity and objectivity necessary in history?
3. Why do historians and philosophers see historical objectivity as a problem?
4. Can we accept the fact that history cannot be objective like science?

Therefore, it seems necessary to explore possible answers to these basic questions. The ways to achieve historical objectivity are as follows.

1. Personal Qualification of the Historian- According to Butterfield, before incorporating objectivity in history, the difference between ordinary general history and investigative history should be understood. General History is brief; the historian cannot embellish it with his personal beliefs and feelings. Therefore, general history can be objective. In exploration or investigative history, the historian selects the facts as per his choice and explains them according to personal and social interest. It is important to establish objectivity in historical presentation. It is only through the personal ability of the historian that he presents the true relationship between characters and events. ^[6] Therefore, to incorporate objectivity in history, personal competence of the historian is absolutely required.
2. Facts should be given priority- While compiling history, the historian keeps his own interpretation which harms objectivity. Therefore, the historian should protect historical objectivity by giving priority to facts. G. N. Clark is of the opinion that it should not be forgotten that the material of history is facts. The facts hidden under the cover of controversy are the basis of knowledge related to the past. Therefore, presentation of facts is necessary for historical objectivity.
3. The use of personal interest- Some historians have made history a medium for propagating their ideas. These people have distorted the facts and given priority to hatred and personal feelings. Such historians should be condemned everywhere. According to Gardiner, "The historian should not abandon objectivity and exaggerate history to suit his personal interests." History is not a means of propagating personal ideas. Those historians who have accepted reconstruction of the past as a means of propaganda

should be excluded from the category of historians. It is more appropriate to call him a publicist rather than a historian.

4. An unbiased historian- The actors of historical events are great men. History is the story of their works and achievements. Historical objectivity requires that their works be studied realistically. The historian should not be influenced by excessive admiration or hatred. Rainier has said that historians who believe in objectivity should keep in mind that history is fact-oriented, not person-oriented.^[7]
5. Selection of facts- The historian does not need to select the facts. In history, one fact itself selects another fact and forces the historian to accept it. No historian is free to select the facts as per his wish. The nature of historical facts is objective. The duty of the historian is to respect the facts while maintaining objectivity. Therefore, the historian should not get trapped in the entanglements of mysticism and should consider the facts described in historical sources as real and should give a useful portrayal of the past.
6. Moral judgment- Morality in history is a superstition. It is not the job of the historian to give moral justice in relation to any event or person. If he acquires the right to moral justice, he will become like a despotic ruler who will claim divine right. He will give punishment or pardon as per his wish. Butterfield has rightly said that “The historian is not a judge, but a servant of historical characters.” All historians agree that moral rights should be abandoned. Hence only with this concept can the historian make history objective.^[8]
7. Impact of Theories- Many theories have an impact on historical interpretation. Theories like communism, capitalism, democracy, nationalism, imperialism and Marxism etc. have most influenced historical interpretation and analysis.^[9] According to Walsh, various theories of historical interpretation are not a problem of historical objectivity.
8. Historical discipline- According to Walsh, history has its own discipline and rules. Historians should follow the historical discipline and rules. Historical objective history is a part of discipline and objectivity is a requirement of history. Only disciplined historians should write history. Some historians believe that there is so much freedom in human discipline that if their statement is true despite differences in opinion, then such people should be expelled from history and society. Ignoring the desirable rules of history would mean corrupting the nature of history.

CONCLUSION

From the above details it is proved that the difference between the objectivity of history and the objectivity of other sciences is that the objectivity of history is not based on the same logic and generalization as the objectivity of science because objectivity in history is objective as well as value based. The historian is unable to leave behind his values and his contemporary values while analyzing his human subject matter. But even if historians can leave aside the traditions, they still must be raised above the insistence of truth. Objectivity can be achieved in history only when it builds a clear link between the past and the future. This relationship can be achieved only through interdependence of values and facts and through action and reaction. Dr. Pandey, referring to the opinions of other thinkers, said that “According to Dilthey, the only way to explain events is to keep them in context. Lord Acton believed the historian should also decide the content of human actions. According to Hegel and Collingwood, thoughts are at the root of human actions”.^[10] Therefore, in the research and interpretation of facts in historical knowledge, two sides of a process should be considered, in which one imaginary limit is the pure object and the other is imaginary. Therefore, it can be said in short that achieving historical objectivity seems impossible, yet it is the duty of every historian to follow all those rules by which historical objectivity can be achieved. Every historian should write history by staying away from his interest, patriotism, religion, caste, culture, region, fear, pressure, political parties and principles and treating them impartially. This type of historical compiling

cannot be objective.

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