

# 1. Historiography : Development in the West

## 1.1 Tradition of Historiography

## 1.2 Modern Historiography

## 1.3 Development of Scientific Perspective in Europe and Historiography

## 1.4 Notable Scholars

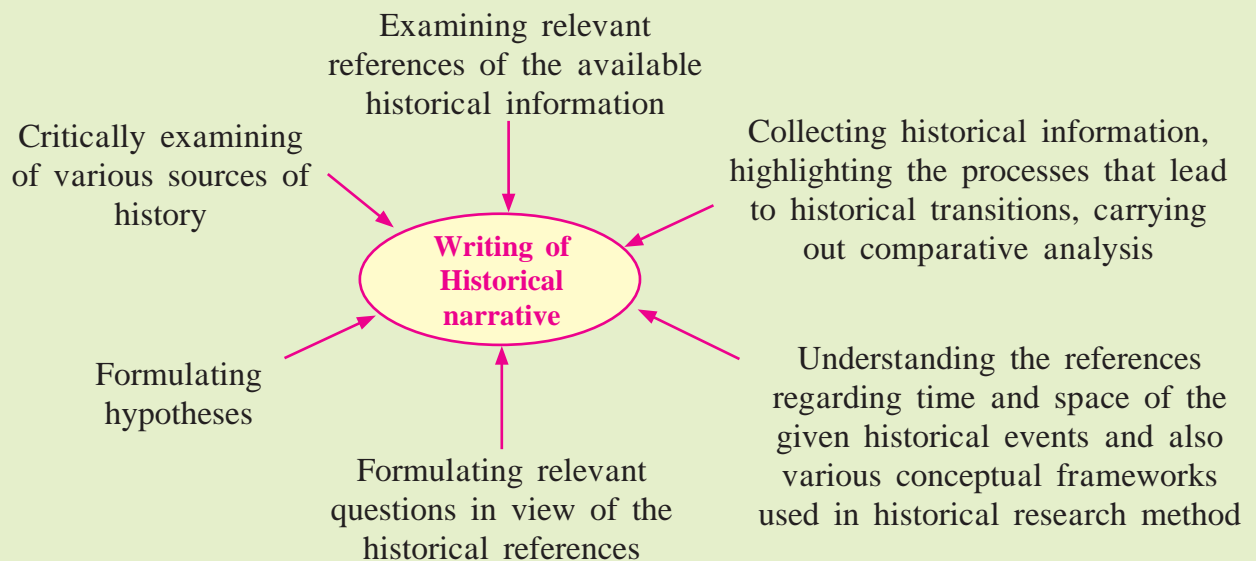
Historical research, writing and studies are carried out with an objective of understanding the chronology of the past events and their interconnections. This is a continuous process.

In the physical and natural sciences the empirical method (laboratory method of experiments and observation) is used to verify the available knowledge. This method allows formulating laws that remain true irrespective of the time and space. Those laws can be tested and proved repeatedly.

In historical research it may not be possible to use the method of laboratory experiments and observation. This is so because we were not present in the historical time and space and the historical events cannot be recreated. Also in history it is not possible to formulate laws that remain true irrespective of the time and space.

To begin, we need an expert who knows the language and script of a historical document in order to read it and understand its meaning. Also, the experts can examine the authenticity of the document by using criteria such as lettering style, author's style of writing, manufacturing date and type of paper, stamps of authority, etc. Such a document is further scrutinised by a historian with the help of relevant historical references.

### Historical Research Method



Methods of various disciplines are useful in historical research. For example, Archaeology, Archival Science, Manuscriptology, Epigraphy (Study of inscriptions), Analysis of lettering style, Linguistics, Numismatics (Study of coins), Genealogy (Study of lineage), etc.

### 1.1 Tradition of Historiography

We have learnt about the historical research method, critically examining the historical sources and writing the historical narrative. The writing of critical historical narrative is known as 'Historiography'. A scholar who writes such a narrative is a historian.

The historian cannot include every past event in his narrative. The inclusion and interpretation of historical events by the historian often depends on the conceptual framework adopted by him. His style of writing is determined by that conceptual framework.

The tradition of writing historical narrative, that is historiography, was not prevalent in the ancient societies of the world. However, that does not mean that they were not aware of the historical time or were not eager to know about it. Ancient people also felt the need of passing on the stories of the life and valour of the ancestors to the next generation. Ancient communities all over the world used various means like cave paintings, story-telling, singing songs and ballads, etc. for this purpose. These traditional means are looked upon as the sources of history in the modern historiography.

### 1.2 Modern Historiography

Four main characteristics of modern historiography :



#### Do you know ?



**The earliest inscription in the Louvre museum**

The above picture shows a fragment of the earliest inscription. A forward marching file of soldiers holding shields and spears is seen here. The General is in the front.

The tradition of recording historical event can be traced back to Sumer civilisation in Mesopotamia. Names of Sumerian kings and the stories of battles fought by them have been preserved in various inscriptions. The earliest inscription shown above, dates back to 4500 B.C.E. It records a battle fought between two kingdoms. It is now displayed at the Louvre museum in France.

(1) Its method is based on scientific principles. It begins with the formation of relevant questions.

(2) These questions are anthropocentric. It means that these questions are about the deeds of the members of ancient human societies of a particular period. History does not suggest any interrelation between the Divine and human deeds.

(3) Answers to these questions are supported by reliable evidence.

(4) History presents a graph of mankind's journey with the help of past human deeds.

It is said that the modern historiography with above characteristics has its roots in the ancient Greek historical writings. 'History' is originally a Greek term. Herodotus, the Greek historian of the fifth century B.C.E. used it first for his book entitled, 'The Histories'.

### 1.3 Development of Scientific Perspective in Europe and Historiography

Till the eighteenth century C.E. Europe had achieved a remarkable progress in the fields of Philosophy and Science. Scholars by then had come to believe in the possibility of studying the social and historical truths by applying scientific methods. Now the philosophical discussions focused more and more on the objectivity in history and historiography.

Prior to the eighteenth century all European universities were interested only in the philosophical discourses revolving around Divine phenomena. However, gradually this scenario began to change. In 1737 C.E. the Gottingen University was founded in Germany. This university for the first time had an independent department of history. Later, other German universities also became centres of historical studies.

### 1.4 Notable Scholars

The contributions of many scholars are important in the development of historiography. Let us have a look at the contributions of the few notable scholars.



**René Descartes**

**René Descartes (1596-1650)** : René Descartes was the foremost among scholars who insisted on verifying the reliability of historical documents by critically examining them.

Among the rules given by him in his book, 'Discourse on the method', the following is supposed to have a great impact on the scientific method of research : Never to accept anything for true till all grounds of doubt are excluded.

**Voltaire (1694-1778)** : Voltaire's original name was François-Marie Arouet. He was French. He opined that along with objective truth and chronology of historical events considering social traditions, trade, economy, agriculture, etc. was also equally



**Voltaire**

important in historiography. It gave rise to the thought that understanding all aspects of human life is important for history writing. Thus, it is said that Voltaire was the founder of modern historiography.

**Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)** : Hegel was a German philosopher. He insisted that the historical reality should be presented in a logical manner. To him the timeline of historical events was indicative of progress. He also thought that the presentation of history is bound to change over time as new



**Georg Wilhelm  
Friedrich Hegel**

evidence would come forth. With Hegel's philosophy many scholars were convinced that historical methods were not of lesser quality though they differed from scientific methods. The collection of his lectures and articles is published in a book, entitled 'Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences'. His book, 'Reason in History', is well known.

**It is good to know this :**

According to Hegel, grasping the meaning of any event happens in terms of two direct opposites. Human mind cannot understand the true nature of that event, without understanding the opposites, for example, True-False, Good-Bad, etc. In order to understand the true nature of a thing one needs to know both true and false, similarly good and bad. This method of analysis which is based on opposites is known as 'Dialectics'. In this method a theory is proposed at the beginning, which is called, 'Thesis'. Then another theory is proposed, which is contrary to the thesis. It is called, 'Antithesis'. After a thorough logical discussion of the both a new thesis is proposed which includes the gist of both, the thesis and the antithesis. This process of arriving at the new thesis is called, 'Synthesis'.

**Leopold von Ranké (1795-1886) :**

Historiography of the nineteenth century was greatly influenced by the thoughts of Leopold Von Ranke of Berlin University. He spoke about the critical method of historical research. He put emphasis on the utmost importance of information



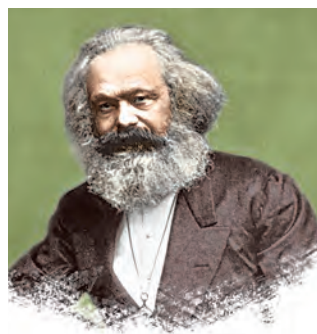
**Leopold von Ranké**

gathered through original documents. He also stated that all types of documents associated with a historical event need to be examined with greatest care. He believed that with this method it was

possible to reach the historical truth. He criticised imaginative narration of history. Collection of his articles is published in two books, entitled 'The Theory and Practice of History' and 'The Secret of World History'.

**Karl Marx (1818-1883) :**

In the latter half of the nineteenth century a new school of thought arose keeping in view the new thesis formulated by Karl Marx. According to Karl Marx, history was not about abstract ideas; it was about living people. Human relationships are shaped by the fundamental needs of people and the ownership as well as nature of



**Karl Marx**

prevalent means of production to meet those needs. The accessibility of these means to different strata of the society may not be equal. This inequality causes

a division of the society into classes, leading to class struggle. According to Marx, human history is the history of class struggle, as the class that owns the means of production economically exploits the rest of the classes. 'Das Kapital', a treatise written by him is the most referred book all over the world.

**Annales School :** At the onset of the twentieth century a new school of historiography arose in France, which is known as 'Annales School'. Annales school gave a new direction to history writing. It was recognised now that history is not only about the political events, kings, great leaders and accordingly politics, diplomacy and wars but also about the climate, local people, agriculture, trade, technology, means of communication, social divisions and their collective psychology, etc. in the historical times. The Annales School was started by French historians.

### **Feminist Historiography**

Feminist historiography means the restructuring of the history from the perspective of women. The writings of Simone de Beauvoir, helped in establishing the fundamentals of feminism. She was French. The feminist historiography emphasised not only on the inclusion of women in history but also on the rethinking of the male dominated perspective of history. It drove historical research to focus in depth on various aspects of women's life such as their employment, their role in trade union, institutions working for their cause, their family life, etc. In the historical writings after 1990 women were portrayed as an independent social class.

**Michel Foucault (1926-1984) :** The French historian of the twentieth century, Michel Foucault brought forth a new concept in historiography. He, in his book, 'Archaeology of Knowledge', argued that the prevailing practice of arranging historical events in a chronological order



**Michel Foucault**

is not right. He drew attention to the fact that archaeology does not strive to reach the ultimate historical truth but attempts to explain various transitions in the past. Foucault felt

that explaining the transitions in history is more important. He called his method, 'the archaeology of knowledge'.

Foucault subjected the so far unacknowledged areas by historians such as psychological disorders, science of medicine, prison administration, etc. to historical analysis.

Thus, the scope of historiography kept continuously expanding. Writing of histories of various subjects like literature, architecture, sculpture, drawing and painting, music, dance, drama, films and television, etc. came into practice.



## Exercise

### 1. (A) Choose the correct option from the given options and complete the statement.

- (1) It may be said that ..... was the founder of modern historiography.  
(a) Voltaire            (b) René Descartes  
(c) Leopold Ranké    (d) Karl Marx
- (2) ..... wrote the book entitled 'Archaeology of Knowledge'.  
(a) Karl Marx        (b) Michel Foucault  
(c) Lucien Febvre    (d) Voltaire

### (B) Identify and write the wrong pair in the following set.

- (1) Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel – 'Reason in History'
- (2) Leopold von Ranké – 'The theory and Practice of History'
- (3) Herodotus – 'The Histories'
- (4) Karl Marx – 'Discourse on the Method'

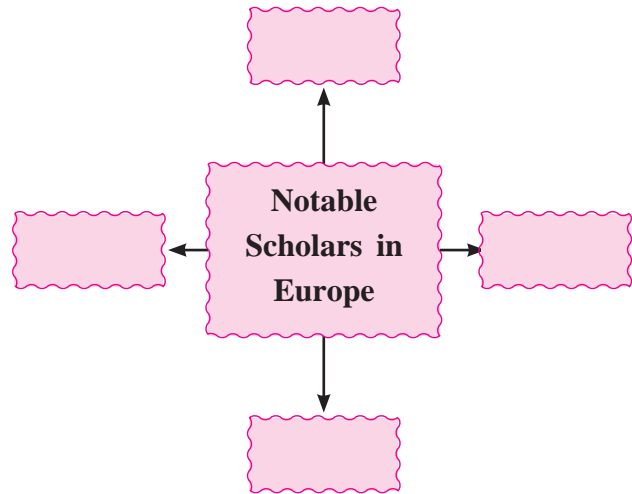
### 2. Write short notes.

- (1) Dialectics
- (2) Annales School

### 3. Explain the following with its reason.

- (1) Historical research was driven to focus in depth on various aspects of women's life.
- (2) Foucault called his method, 'the archaeology of knowledge'.

### 4. Complete the concept chart.



### 5. Answer the following in detail.

- (1) Explain Karl Marx's 'Class Theory'.
- (2) What are the four characteristics of modern historiography?
- (3) What is feminist historiography?
- (4) Explain Leopold von Ranké's perspective of history?

### Project

Obtain detailed information on your favourite subject and write its history. For example :

- History of Pen
- History of Printing technology
- History of Computers

