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## The Study of Local History: A New Approach

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### Abstract

*The study of local history is not dominated by antiquarians who throw together the physical remains of the past without any attention to using their collections to effect change in the future. This form of surface history allows historians to develop a pattern of findings without deep engagement with local history in a comparative context. What is worse, this stereotype of history does not help us to understand the dynamics of a place. These historians can take such a narrow view that they miss the insights that history provides about our future. By missing the opportunity to examine and interpret findings from historical evidence, historians are missing out on what local history does best. Local history reflects the reality that our lives are shaped by particular places and that our physical location in the world is a major determinant of how our lives are lived. Local history is the study of the everyday struggles and triumphs of ordinary people. Studying local*

*subjects allows for in-depth research linking the past to the present, which is done more simply and with more meaning than studying national, faceless populations. It allows for a more in-depth study of the history of our communities and the relationships with the people within them.*

### Key Words

*Study, Populations, Local history.*

### Introduction

Now a days History is no longer a chronicle of the kings and wars. It is not even regarded as an edifying branch of literature. This is a subject, which is much more interested in the life and deeds of common people. The scope of modern historical writing has broadened so as to include all aspects of social life. A number of sciences and arts come under the historical purview.

The very word History may be used in two broad categories such as- the sum total of man's achievements and experiences as well as the interpretative account of such actions by a historian. Whatever view we adopt, the fact will remain that each generation has its own outlook on history and this will be governed by the pressure of current situations. Accordingly its selection and interpretation of occurrences of the past will also differ. This is the reason why history is being re-written as well as re-constructed from one generation to another and each version differs in its colour and texture from those which preceded and makes others likely to follow it.

As a subject of study History is completely at the mercy of its sources. It deals with the past people or a country, on the basis only of the traces or records. The discovery of such traces and records is itself an independent and arduous job. These historical sources are nothing but the remains of man's unique activities in a society. So far as the past is concerned, we have to work with what evidence has survived. At the same time no one can foresee the changes in the relative importance and value of documents for future students. Anyone who destroys any but the most trivial records of public affairs and even of private occurrences, incurs the risk of obliterating evidence of historical value.

However, the authentic history is the story of human societies as told by the earnest students of the subject. For every human being the memory of his (or her) individual experiences is a matter of primary importance. Without it he (or she) cannot take any important decision, nor advance in the path of progress. He or she cannot even survive without keeping such memory constantly fresh. It is through history that man (or woman) uses his (or her) accumulated experience. If 'History' is ill-told or misapplied or misinterpreted, then it can be dangerous to the society. The word 'History' indicates the past time. On the basis of certain fundamental factors, the said past time can be divided into several broad periods namely, Pre-Historic, Ancient, Medieval, Modern and Post Modern etc. But about the specific time span of a so called period, there is so many arguments and counter arguments. How far the so called periodic divisions in the study of history are correct, nothing can be said with certainty. It is nothing but a general consensus among the historians and scholars.

In India, the historical studies and researches began with a new outlook during the early period of the foreign imperial rule. During that time, Indian scholars and researchers were very much influenced by the western way of thinking. But it does not mean at all that during the pre-imperial period the age old Indian culture did not bear any historiographical outlook. By the way, in the year 1905, the partition of Bengal gave a big thrust on Indian national movement and undoubtedly it inspired Indian historians and scholars to give more attention to explore the great Indian past, through their valuable researches. This can be marked as a new epoch in Indian historiography. In this connection, a number of books were written on the national history, on the regional history and local history as well, by Indian scholars highlighting the glorious past. These books no doubt helped to form an overall nationalistic outlook among the common educated people of Indian sub-continent, and also exposed the imperial motivation to rule the very sub-continent. Although, most of these books were not free from certain demerits, like chauvinism and biasness.

In sixty years, after the independence, Indian historical studies and researches have been gradually changing its conventional way of thinking. But the basic features of the so-called methodology, namely - Heuristics, which deals with the art of search for and the collection of various kinds of documents; Criticism, it is the critical interpretation or examination of the same documents; Synthesis, it indicates to group the historical facts and to ascertain their casual genesis, and Exposition, which is the narration or the presentation of the historical fact; have not yet been changed. Apart from these basic features, there are so many aspects namely-new outlooks, new attitudes, new types of arguments, new research areas, constantly evolving as well as enriching the aforesaid field. As we all know, the documents namely - remains and records, are the main pivots to this study. The Remains means the skeletal remains and the things which were made. The Records are those materials written or printed that have been made deliberately for the purpose of transmitting information. These documents or sources are of two fundamental kinds- primary and secondary. The worth of a primary source is measured by its opportunities for knowing the truth. Whereas a secondary source is one that borrows its knowledge from others.

In India each district has a specific area and this area certainly bears its own historical documents (of the human civilization) of the different periods and these are of large numbers. But all these historical documents are not even accommodated or utilized to write the history in a broader perspective such as the national history or the provincial history or the history of a particular period. But these bulk amount of documents are not insignificant to write the history of a specific locality, through the ages. This is the basic target point to write

the district oriented history or better to say the 'Local History'. However it could be remembered that the study of 'Local History' does not indicate or bear any meaning to write a new form of district gazetteer.

In the study of 'Local History', apart from political, socio-economic, religious and cultural data of different periods, there are several other aspects, of a particular district which are to be incorporated such as- the family history, fares and festivals, environment, art and architecture, social organizations like-schools, colleges, libraries and museums, folk art and craft, folk religion, folk tale, folk songs, archaeological site, communication system, local newspapers and periodicals, renowned personalities, historic events as recorded, floras and faunas, tribal people and their culture etc. But in case of the folk-culture related data or documents proper scrutiny should be made to avoid the myths and exaggerations. The special feature of this particular type of study is the formation of a 'Data Bank'. The local colleges, libraries, museums within a district can be selected as the prime spot to install the 'Data Bank' with the help of historians, trained researchers and I.T. professionals. All types of data on history and cultural heritage of the different periods will be systematically arranged and preserved in the 'Data Bank' for the purpose of writing 'Local History'. If it is possible, then a bulk amount of data in connection with the study of 'Local History' may be protected. Another aspect in the study of 'Local History' is application of language to generate the significant thinking among the common educated people. For this purpose, the vernacular language should be used as the main tool, apart from the English language.

Each and every local culture obviously bears some unique features and these features are quite different from the national as well as provincial features; but it does not indicate that the existing local culture is out of the main stream. In this particular type of study, there is no room for the local chauvinistic outlook as well as any mode of biasness. In India many books on the 'Local History' had been written by the amateurs in the pre-independence period. No doubt some sort of nationalistic outlook among the common educated mass had been generated by these books. But most of these books were written on the basis of secondary sources and myths. Indirectly these books were responsible to inject the chauvinistic outlook to the common educated mass. After the independence, the overall picture did not change. Number of books on the 'Local History', based on the secondary sources and myths, not pursuing the proper historical methodology namely- heuristics, criticism, synthesis and exposition, are being written and in future will be written. In West Bengal the study of 'Local History' bears the same pathetic picture.

## Conclusion

It can be said that the study of 'Local History' is not a hypothetical thesis and it not even indicates the cloistered type of study. It is the only way by which the common educated mass can able to acquire the exact knowledge of history of their own land and at the same time can feel their position in the perspective of provincial as well as national history. The study of Local History' is a collective effort of the professional historians and trained researchers with the support of common educated people of a particular district, obviously in the vernacular language. By this new type of study, the exact historical knowledge can be generated among the educated mass for the sake of national integrity, which is very essential now to our country.

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