

PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Some Reflections
on North-East India

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Dr. S.C. Daniel

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Foreword



Dr. S.C. Daniel



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Foreword

While history is basically a science for the study of development in a period or over some periods of time, the philosophy of history essentially aims at determining the nature and significance of that development in a logical way. In other words, both are interested in human past, though the historian's concern is the understanding and analysis of the past, while the philosopher of history would draw on historical writings for a comprehensive explanation of the historical processes and conceptualization of these processes. The fact that history by nature is more analytic and more explanatory than chronicle of account or narrative of the past is justifying enough to explain its causal dependence. And for the same reason, the historians are also philosophers in their own field. They not only describe a development but also explain the causes and effects of such a development. They make the facts speak for themselves in complete nuances and ramifications and go further to explain if something had happened, why did it happen, and if not, why not. The basic tools of a historian are the data or source material, but he also reads between the lines and applies his mind to link the text and the context, to interpret the information and to draw the conclusions and formulations. These conclusions and formulations draw him closer to the philosophers of history who use the historical writings to conceptualize the human past and to predict the future on the basis of historical explanations. To a philosopher of history, the causal explanation relates to the past and teleological explanation points to the

future; and to a historian, the future is predicted on the basis of the past. The past is an experience and an index to what may come in the future. The lesson of history is that if the conditions which contributed to a particular situation or event or development in the past do repeat then one should be ready to face same situation or event or development under similar conditions.

The processes in the history of mankind are older than the discipline called history and these processes came into action as soon as the man dawned on earth. The civilizations in different parts of our planet experienced these processes, or at least some of these, at different points of time and this fact explains why the levels of development differ from region to region. The conditions which determine the courses of history appeared in some region later, or even much later, than others. The North-Eastern Region of India, or North East India, which stands between two important geographical divisions representing two great civilizations of the world, namely, Indian and Chinese, is known for geographical, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and economic diversities in itself. Described by Dr. Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay as "the Eastern Gateway for passage of Peoples, Commodities and Ideas between China and India", the total geographical area of the region today is 2,55,037 square kilometres. Its international boundary with Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma), China (including Tibet) and Bhutan runs to 4,200 kilometres, while it is connected with the rest of India by the narrow 'Siliguri neck' of less than 20 kilometres in North Bengal. The major portion of the region is hilly. Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are hill states with minor patches or dots of dales and valleys, while Assam, Manipur and Tripura cover both hills and plains. The Brahmaputra and the Barak, both of which ultimately confluence in the Meghna in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) are the two great rivers of the region. The Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley (the latter includes the adjoining plains portion of Tripura) are the major plains tracts connected with Northern Bengal and the South-East Bengal respectively. The Manipur Valley is virtually encircled by the hills, barring a narrow plains tract provided by the slim trans-Barak basin which connects the Manipur Valley with the Barak Valley. The

Brahmaputra Valley, which is the largest plains tract in the region, extends for about 600 kilometres from Sadiya in the East to Dhubri in West Assam where the Brahmaputra turns towards the south and along the western edge of the Garo Hills of Meghalaya. The valley of the Brahmaputra is only about 75 kilometres wide and it was easily accessible from Bengal plains on the west even in early times. Barring the opening to Bengal plains near Dhubri that forms a narrow neck, the rest of the Valley is bordered by a continuous hills chain in succession, by the Meghalaya plateau or Assam range, Naga hills, Arunachal hills and Bhutan, like a garland. The valleys of Brahmaputra and the Barak are separated from each other by a segment of the Assam range, i.e. North Cachar Hills, immediately intervening between the two. The Barak Valley-Tripura plains tract, which is commonly called Ishan Banga or North-East Bengal, is bounded on three sides by the North Cachar hills, Manipur hills, Mizo hills and the Chittagong hills forming virtually a high wall, while on the fourth it is followed in slow succession by the plains districts of Bengal without disturbing the landscape. The hills division starts from the western slope of the Garo hills. Khasi-Jaintia hills, and the North Cachar hills, and then it joins the Mikir (Karbi) hills, Naga hills, Arunachal hills and the Bhutan hills, which together form part of the Eastern Himalayas. The Naga hills, Manipur hills, Mizo hills and the adjoining hills in Burma also form a chain of mountain ranges. The Brahmaputra Valley, Meghalaya hills, Barak Valley and Tripura thus directly border Bengal, while Manipur and Tripura has direct access to Burma, Arunachal to Tibet (China) and Assam to Bhutan. No wonder, despite the geographical and political isolation and difficult terrains, the states and tribal formations in North East India maintained commercial contacts between the natural divisions and also across these divisions, through buffer zones and communities, in the region as well as with neighbouring Bengal, Bhutan, Tibet, China and Burma since time immemorial.

The migrations and settlement of the peoples in the region in earliest periods of historical development also occurred on the basis of direct accessibility. The migrations were through the easily available routes. The Indo-Aryans and the

Tibeto-Burmans migrated from the respective directions and settled down in the easily accessible divisions and settled down permanently. In the earliest stage of development the Tibeto-Burmans or the Austriacs and Mongolians of Tiber, China, Burma, Thailand and Laos migrated and settled all over the region. The Indo-Aryans then migrated and settled in the valleys of Brahmaputra and the Barak. These two divisions were since then integrated in the pan-Indian cultural continuum and there was a spontaneous assimilation of the Indo-Aryan and the Indo-Mogoloids in these divisions. The earliest state formations of Brahmanical Hindu model were also noticed in these two divisions at least since the fifth century AD. The Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa and the Harikela were the earliest known states in the valleys of Brahmaputra and the Barak respectively. The Barak Valley sector was included in the Samata State of Eastern and South-Eastern Bengal for most of the early periods. In seventh century for a short period a portion of the Barak valley formed part of Kamarupa under Bhaskar Varman. Thereafter, there was the revival of Samata and Harikela in quick successions. In 10th century, the Barak Valley was included in the Vanga State of East Bengal. After the decline of Vanga, Shrihatta Rajya emerged as an autonomous state in this Valley. In the Brahmaputra Valley, the decline of Kamarupa was followed by emergence of a number of smaller states ruled by local dynasties. One of these, the Salasthambha dynasty was possibly of a Bodo tribal origin. This indicates the type of cultural assimilation that was in operation at least in the plains tracts of the region. The history of these dynasties is known from the inscriptions, coins, archaeological remains and literary sources. Sanskrit language was used by the local rulers for official purposes. Some of the rivers and hills of the region were mentioned in the ancient Indian literature as holy. The Parasurama Kundyo in Arunachal Pradesh, Kamakshya in Assam, Siddheswara in Barak Valley, Unakuti in Tripura etc were respected as holy shrines all over India. In the medieval period, the state formation processes of the same model extended beyond the two valleys. The Ahom, Koch, Dimasa Kachari, Jaintia, Tripuri, Manipuri (Meitei) were among the important medieval states of the region. Assamese and Bengali languages developed

during this period, and these two languages, besides Sanskrit, Ahom and Meitei, were used in local courts. The medieval period is also known for several invasions from Bengal. Though most of these invasions were unsuccessful, the parts of Lower Assam and Barak Valley passed under Mughal rule and some of the local rulers temporarily acknowledged Mughal suzerainty. Nevertheless, the Mughal contacts positively influenced the social, economic and cultural life of the region. The Bhakti-Sufi movements made deep impacts in Assam and Barak-Valley as in case of rest of India. The famous saint, Sankaradeva of Assam was a great social reformer and he contributed greatly to the development of modern Assamese language and literature. The Vaisnava movement of Shri Chaitanya in Bengal became a strong movement in Barak Valley and there from, it penetrated into Manipur. The settled cultivation, terrace and plough started in the plains in early times, whereas in the hills, jhumming and tribal social and political formations continued throughout the ancient and medieval periods. Nevertheless, the economic relations between the hills and the plains were maintained through the markets which emerged in the foothills. The barter was the dominant mode of economy. The surplus produces of the villages were exchanged with the neighbours to balance the deficits. The markets also played a very important role in exchange of ideas and cultural contacts between the hills and the plains and the various communities in the region. In the nineteenth century, the British occupied the region in several instalments and integrated it in their Indian colonial state. The Christian Missions came in the British period and since then the Christianity made a strong impact, particularly in the hills. The western education and English language were also introduced in the same period. The tribal languages were reduced to writing in Roman script at the initiative of missionaries. In most of these languages, today we have rich literature. The British rule also saw the opening up of the region through roads and railways and other means of communication. The exploitation of oil and coal deposits started and the tea industry was introduced. Some other minor industries also made a beginning, though the traditional art and crafts received a set back and the rural economy lost

its autonomy. Modern education, administration and urbanisation became major factors of social change to which the people of the region spontaneously responded. Before long, craze for white collar job became the order. A dominant middle class came in the scene. The region positively responded to India's national struggle for freedom. After independence, Assam has been reorganised in phases into four states. NEFA has been separated from Assam and gradually elevated to the status of a State. Manipur and Tripura, which were princely states in the British period, are also fulfilled states. The North-Eastern Council and a common High Court with Benches in the state capitals are the unifying factors today, though the geographical contiguity, historical linkages, economic backwardness and a general feeling of isolation and indifference of the central authority are more dominant unifying forces.

North East India passed through the historical processes which were experienced in rest of India and the neighbouring countries, particularly South and South-East Asia. The factors and stages of historical development of human society like hunting and gathering, neolithic revolution and the dawn of the metal age; domestication of animals, beginning of agriculture and the village formations; evolution of customs and practices, traditional institutions and institutional change; social stratification, communal holdings; transition from tribal to complex societies; agriculture, crafts and industry; emergence of private property; State formations; barter to money economy; short and long distance trade; co-existence of tribal and non-tribal societies; religion, value system and new values; illiteracy, literacy and education for some; tribal polity, monarchy, feudal order; rise and fall of states and kingdoms; imperialism and colonialism; urbanisation; emergence and hegemony of the middle class; social reforms, philanthropists and philosophers; modern democracy, local self-government; ethnic conflicts, communal and linguistic violence, peasants and workers movements, class struggle; nationalism; extremist and secessionist movements; etc. have all been experienced in this region. Therefore, the global perceptions of the philosophers of history and the historical

explanations offered in specific contexts and in similar conditions are likely to be relevant to the region.

Dr. S.C. Daniel's *Philosophy of History: Some Reflections on North East-India* is the first and a serious attempt at an understanding of the subject. The book is a collection of eight papers presented by the author in the annual sessions of the North East India History Association (NEIHA) between 1991 and 1998. He discussed the views of eight globally acclaimed philosophers, viz. David Hume, Immanuel Kant, George William Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Shri Aurobindo and Karl Raimund Popper. To apply the theories of these great thinkers, Dr. Daniel drew mainly on the writings of six historians of North East India, viz. S.K. Bhuyan, H.K. Barpujari, Amalendu Guha, N.N. Bhattacharjee, J.B. Bhattacharjee and D.R. Syiemlieh. In first two chapters of the book, he discussed the logic of historical analysis in the context of North East Indian historiography and the objectivity and history as a case study of North East India. Between these two chapters, Dr. Daniel has broadly reviewed the formulations of the great philosophers of history of the world vis-à-vis the historiography of North east India on a selective basis and stated his own positioning of the better known historians of the region. Equally interesting is his introduction wherein he states his own arguments about the merit of historical explanations. In the chapter on objectivity, he discusses and rejects at least eight criterions of achieving objectivity as formulated by well known scholars, and adds a ninth, called 'relative objectivity', which, according to him, "is sustained and preserved by the continuity of historical inquiry without ignoring the significance of historical facts". He further states that "the task of historiographer is to maintain and preserve the continuity of historical inquiry so as to have a holistic account of such an inquiry". He is "convinced that history is capable of achieving this purpose by adopting the ninth criterion." This position of the author may generate a debate in philosophy of history and several eye-brows are likely to be raised on his positioning of the historians of North East India. Nevertheless, it is a well known fact that research flourishes through debates and controversies and the scholars contribute more positively by agreeing to disagree. I wish that this call is responded to by

the scholars in spirit it has been forwarded. Dr. Daniel will also certainly welcome a scholarly debate on the subject and his efforts will be rewarded only when this debate leads to a better understanding of the historiography of North East India.

I have known Dr. S.C. Daniel as an esteemed colleague at NEHU for more than two decades and I have always appreciated his scholarly devotion to his work and interdisciplinary interests. We enjoyed discussing some of the issues which are common between history and philosophy and mutually learnt from each other both by agreeing and disagreeing. The papers presented by him in NEIHA sessions always evinced keen interests and provoked serious discussions. I congratulate him for the decision to bring out those papers in a single collection.

Silchar
15 April 1999

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Acknowledgements

I wish to express my thanks to Professor J.B. Bhattacharjee, Vice-Chancellor of Assam University, Silchar, for his generous foreword to this book. I feel that I do not deserve the compliments which Professor J.B. Bhattacharjee has very magnanimously showered on me. I must thank Dr. C. Joshua Thomas, Deputy Director, North-Eastern Regional Centre of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, Shillong, for his valuable encouragement and timely help. It is no exaggeration to say that without his valuable support this book would not have seen the light of the day. I owe my gratitude to Professors J.B. Bhattacharjee, Milton S. Sangma, Imdad Hussain, and J.P. Singh, and Drs. D.R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma of the Department of History of North-Eastern Hill University for making me a member of North-East India History Association (NEIHA), and for encouraging me to present papers on Philosophy of History in the annual sessions of this renowned organisation. I gratefully acknowledge my debt to the North East India History Association (NEIHA) for giving me the opportunity to present my papers in its Annual Sessions held at Jagi Road, Assam; North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya; Jorhat, Assam; Doimukh, Arunachal University, Arunachal Pradesh; Silchar, Assam University, Silchar, Assam; Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram; Agartala, Tripura University, Tripura; and Kohima, the capital of Nagaland; and also for publishing seven of the papers in the Twelfth (1991), Thirteenth (1993), Fourteenth (1993), Fifteenth (1994), Sixteenth (1995), Seventeenth (1996)

and Eighteenth (1997) Proceedings volumes. The eighth paper was read at the Nineteenth Session (1998). I thank the North-East India History Association for the permission to publish these articles in this collection. I take this opportunity to thank Shri Joseph F. Khongbuh, for typing the manuscript with utmost love, care and efficiency. Thanks for my wife, Mrs. Diana Daniel, and for my sons, Collins Tilak Daniel and Robert Chandran Daniel for sharing my struggle and anxiety with enduring love and affection. I must thank my University, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, for supporting me with financial assistance to attend the annual sessions of NEIHA held in various places of North-East India.

S.C. Daniel

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Papers Presented at Annual Sessions of the North East India History Association

1. "The Logic of Historical Analysis: Reflection on North-Eastern Historiography," Twelfth Session, Jagi Road, 1991.
2. "Objectivity and History: A Case Study of North East India", Thirteenth Session, Shillong, 1993.
3. "Karl Popper and the Poverty of Historicism – A Critical Approach", Fourteenth Session, Jorhat, 1993.
4. "Hegel's Philosophy of History: A Critical Evaluation", Fifteenth Session, 1994.
5. "Hume's Theory of History: A Conspectus", Sixteenth Session, Assam University, Silchar, 1995.
6. "Karl Marx's Theory of History", Seventeenth Session, Government Aizawl College, Aizawl, 1996.
7. "Sri Aurobindo's Theory of History: A Philosophical Investigation", Eighteenth Session, Tripura University, Agartala, 1997.
8. "Kant's Philosophy of History: A Conspectus", Nineteenth Session, Nagaland University, Kohima, 1998.

Introduction

The function of philosophy of history was considered to be one that of determining the nature and significance of the human past. And this concept of history of philosophy was held to be valid and correct until almost the end of nineteenth century. Philosophy of history so regarded has had a long and distinguished career beginning from Graeco-Roman times and ending with the grand theories expounded by great philosophers of history such as Vico, Hegel, Comte, and Marx. This traditional view of philosophy of history claimed that the philosophers of history were primarily concerned with the same subject-matter as historians in the over simplified way as mentioned earlier, however, approaching it from a different direction, which was at variance with that of the historians. The philosophers of history were occupied with the ambitious programme of offering an all-comprehensive interpretation of the historical process as a *whole*, and not with the rather limited and partial inquiries that were to be found in ordinary historical work. In other words, the philosophers of history aimed at a *holistic* approach. However, it must be pointed out that these philosophers of history more often than not conceptualized the past in different ways. Of these different ways, two are very fundamental and important, which are as follows: (1) Perceiving the past as manifesting a *unilinear progression* towards a better state, and (2) perceiving a cyclical pattern of the past that involved the continuous repetition of recognizable models of growth and decay. Those philosophers

of history who belong to category (2) differ from each other as regards the principles that govern those continual recurrence of identifiable patterns of growth and decay. Some considered those patterns as governed by causal or mechanistic principles akin to those explained by physical sciences while some depended on rational or teleological concepts which helped them to find in history a manifestation of certain logical principles or *unitary design*. Some believed in necessary or deterministic order to which the sequence of events conformed while some other found room for some sort of contingency or freedom. But, whatever differences of perspectives and importance there may have been, they were all concerned with a *substantive or factual branch of study* that dealt directly with the phenomenon of human affairs albeit from a lofty point of view.

The present century, that is, the twentieth century, has been witnessing a radical change in the conception of philosophy of history. The central aspiration of the classical conception of philosophy of history to offer a total explanatory account of the past is not being regarded sympathetically in the present century. The classical philosophers are being criticized for working with an imprecise and vague conceptual apparatus. They are also being criticized of formulating hypotheses which are considered to be rather unclear and arbitrary. The general complaint against the classical or traditional conception of philosophy of history is that it depended on unexamined *a priori* assumptions. The methodology of the classical philosophy of history is found to be inadequate since it is scientifically oriented. At present times, philosophy of history is regarded as a second-order inquiry or criteriology. And this second-order inquiry or criteriology tries to explain and judge the ways in which historians describe or understand the past. The philosophy of history of *Analytic Age* analyses the presuppositions of historical narratives, the various categories of historical judgement and explanation, and the arguments to support or establish the conclusions arrived at. Needless to point out that it has become essentially analytical and conceptual.

It may not be out of place here to make a distinction between history and philosophy of history. Needless to point out that a discussion on the nature of philosophy of history is a precondition for writing a book on philosophy of history. Philosophers and historians differ in their views as to the nature of this branch of philosophy. Even the practising philosophers of history agree to disagree with each other about the proper subject matter of this unique discipline. To determine the nature as well as the exact subject matter of this discipline, it will be helpful to discuss four familiar and yet important viewpoints on this matter albeit in a rather perfunctory manner. According to the first view, it is the business of the philosophers of history to emphasize the broader and metaphysical implications of philosophy of history, which consists in speculating about the ontological categories that are to be used in talking about 'being-as-such'. The second view assigns the task of giving an exposition of the pre-suppositions and pre-dispositions of the historians to the philosopher of history. Adopting this view, the philosopher of history may point out that the historians pre-suppose that there is some sort of order in nature, and he may point that the preferences of the historians for deterministic laws, or for mechanistic rather than teleological explanation. The third view treats philosophy of history as a discipline which analyses and clarifies the concepts and theories of history. This is to say that there are certain types of conceptual analysis that should be classified as part of philosophy of history. What types of conceptual analysis are they? The fourth view of philosophy of history answers this crucial question. This view is that philosophy of history is a second-order criteriology, which seeks to answer the following kinds of questions: (i) What are the distinguishing features of historical inquiry? (ii) What procedures should be prescribed to historians in investigating the human past? (iii) What conditions must a historical explanation satisfy in order to be correct? This view recognizes three orders of discipline, namely, 0 (zero) level order, first level order, and second level order. The following chart brings out the distinction between these three levels crystal clear.

Level	Discipline	Subject matter
0	None	Facts
1	History	Explanation of the human past.
2	Philosophy of History	Analysis of the Procedures and Logic of Historical Explanations.

It may be noted here that it is not possible to draw an absolute and sharp distinctions between history and philosophy of history; for the distinction can be based only on a difference of *intent* rather than a difference of subject matter.

The title of my book is, *Philosophy of History: Some Reflections on North-East India*. I must confess that I have been able to discuss the views of very few philosophers of history such as David Hume, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Karl Popper, and Sri Aurobindo. This is not to say that there are no other equally important philosophers of history; in fact, there are. I have not also been able to include all the historians of North-East India. However, the historians of North-East India that I have included such as S.K. Bhuyan, J.B. Bhattacharjee, H.K. Barpujari, A. Guha, N.N. Bhattacharyya, and D.R. Syiemlieh are fair and true representatives of this region; for they are some of the most important and eminent historians of this beautiful region of our country.

The book consists of eight chapters. The first chapter is entitled "*The Logic of Historical Analysis: Reflections on North-Eastern Historiography*". This chapter tries to establish that history is not a purely ideographic science, and that there is no fundamental difference between the logical structure of explanation in historical and generalizing science. A few instances from the historical writings on North-East India have been cited to substantiate this thesis.

The second chapter is on "*Objectivity and History: A Case Study of North East India*". The chapter considers eight criteria of objectivity in a nutshell and rejects them as being vacuous or empty or unintelligent or expressionless. A ninth criterion is proposed to indicate that history has 'relative' objectivity. Instances from writings on North-East India have been used to bring out the relevance of the proposed criterion.

The third chapter gives a conspectus of *Hume's Theory of History*. Hume's addition theory of knowledge is highlighted here. It has been pointed out that though Hume is a particularist in epistemology, metaphysics, and religion, he seems to uphold universalism in history. Hume's theory of history is made relevant in case of the historical writings on North-East India.

Kant's Philosophy of History forms the fourth chapter in which an attempt is made to reconstruct Kant's Philosophy of History logically with the help of his History of Reason, History as the Moral Totality and The History of Philosophy and its Architectonic. As it has been my wont, the writings on North-East India have been related to Kant's Philosophy of History.

The fifth chapter critically evaluates *Hegel's Philosophy of History*. The historical writings of the eminent historian S. K. Bhuyan on North East India have been cited as an example of his closeness to at least one of the fundamental principles of Hegel's philosophy of History.

The sixth chapter on "*Karl Marx's Theory of History*" tries to explicate Karl Marx's theory of history as a normative one. In this connection, a normative approach has been suggested to understand better the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and multi-religious North-Eastern society.

The seventh chapter is concerned with one of the greatest philosophers of modern India. It discusses *Sri Aurobindo's Theory of History* with the help of Hegelian Idealism, Indian Idealism and Universalism, especially with regard to religion. It also connects Sri Aurobindo's theory with that of some historical writings on North-East India.

The eighth chapter deals with "*Karl Popper and the Poverty of Historicism*". It tries to invalidate the argument of Popper, which tries to refute historicism. As in the other chapters, I have drawn some inspiration from the historical writings on North-East India in order to provide substance to my argument.

The Logic of Historical Analysis: Reflections on North Eastern Historiography

It is widely held that there is a distinction between two types of science, namely, nomothetic and ideographic.¹ The nomothetic science seeks to establish abstract general laws for infinitely repeatable processes while the ideographic science aims to understand the unique and the non-recurrent. It is often maintained that natural sciences are nomothetic, and that history (in the sense of an account of events) is ideographic. It is also generally claimed that the logic and conceptual structure of historical explanations are fundamentally different from those of natural sciences. This chapter makes an attempt to show that history is not a purely ideographic science, and that there is no radical difference between the logical structure of explanation in historical and generalizing sciences. A few examples from the historical writings on North-East India have been discussed to strengthen this position.

There is, in fact, a *prima facie* difference between theoretical natural sciences and history, which is as follows. The statements of the former are usually general in form while almost all the statements of the latter are singular, which make use of proper names, dates, geographic specifications, language, literature, sociological factors, and so on. Thus, for example, Professor J.B. Bhattacharjee considers the historical developments in the Barak Valley essentially as an extension

of Bengal phenomenon on the basis of geographical and sociological structure of that valley. He makes use of the names of places, rivers and hills to substantiate his contentions.² I am inclined to believe that he offers this explanation as a logical one. It would, however, be erroneous to conclude that singular statements have no place in the theoretical sciences, or that universal or general statements have no place in historical inquiry. I claim that historical inquiry makes use of general statements for the following reason. Historians often aim to be more than mere chroniclers of the past by attempting to understand and explain recorded action in terms of their causes and consequences. In order to do this, they must assume certain well-established laws of causal dependence. Nonetheless, there is an important asymmetry between theoretical and historical sciences, which consists in the fact that the former try to establish laws while the latter desist from doing so.

Do the logic and conceptual structure of historical explanation differ in *kind* from that of natural sciences? My answer is in the negative. And the argument, which establishes my negative answer, is as follows. It has been said that there is a *formal* difference between the 'general concepts' of the theoretical sciences and the 'individual concepts', which are assumed to be the goals of historical inquiry. The concepts of the former sort are alleged to conform to the familiar logical principle of the inverse variation of the extension and intention of terms, that is, when a set of general terms is arranged in order of their increasing extensions, their intentions decrease while in the case of the concepts of the latter sort, quite the opposite is said to hold good, that is, greater the scope of such a concept, the richer and fuller would be its 'meaning'. For example, the term 'French Enlightenment' is claimed to have not only a more inclusive scope than the term 'the life of Voltaire' but also to possess a fuller intention. This is simply a confusion. And this confusion is not least due to the failure to distinguish the relation of *inclusion* from that of whole-part relation between an instance of a term and a component of that term. Thus, though the term 'French Enlightenment' may be said to 'contain' as one of its 'components', 'the life of Voltaire', it is a mistake to say that the

extension of the former term includes the *extension* of the latter term.

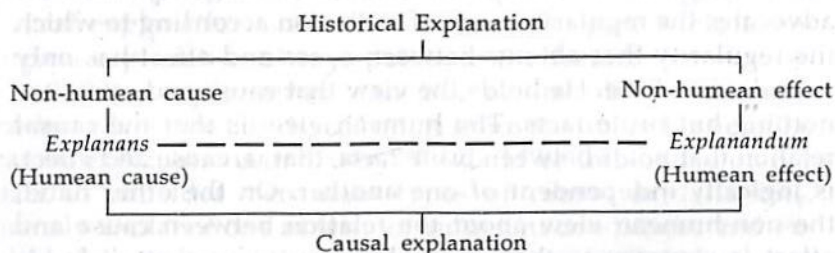
What is historical analysis? Historical analysis consists in giving historical explanation. What is an explanation? The term 'explanation' is derived from two terms, namely, *ex* and *plano*, which means 'out of' and to 'make plain' respectively. The term, therefore, literally means *making plain or clear something which appears to be obscure or mysterious*. What is historical explanation? This vital question can be answered by making a sharp distinction between interpretation or understanding on the one hand and explanation on the other. The question asked and answered in interpretation or understanding is: 'What is this?' While in explanation the question asked and explained is 'Why this?' The explanation explains what there is (the facts). Moreover, understanding is connected with *intentionality* in a way explanation is not. There are mainly two kinds of explanations, namely causal and teleological. The causal explanation normally points to the past while teleological explanation always points to the future.

Before explanation can begin, its object, namely, *explanandum* must be described. Is there any room for genuine causal explanations in history? It would be imperative on my part to consider two main types of causal explanations, namely explanations in term of sufficient conditions, and explanations in term of necessary conditions before I answer this important but highly controversial question. It may not be out of place here to indicate, albeit briefly, the difference between sufficient condition and necessary condition. Suppose, *p* is a sufficient condition of *q*. Whenever *p* is, *q* will be there too. This means that the presence of *p* suffices to ensure the presence of *q*. On the other hand, *p* is a necessary condition of *q* means that whenever *q* is, *p* has to be there too, that is, the presence of *q* requires or presupposes the presence of *p*. The causal explanation in terms of sufficient conditions answers the question of the schematic form. *Why necessary?*, and the causal explanation in terms of necessary conditions answer the question of the type *how possible?* Causal explanations which look for sufficient conditions are not *directly* relevant to historical research. However, they may be *indirectly* relevant in two typical ways. One is when their *explananda*

(states or events in the world) have interesting 'effects' on subsequent human affairs. The other is when their *explanantia* (states or events which are causally necessary for the existence of coming into being of the *explananda*) have interesting 'causes' in antecedent human actions and conditions.

A distinction between humean causes and humean effects on the one hand and a distinction between non-humean causes and non-humean effects on the other must be made in order to explicate the nature of causal explanation in history. Philosophers make a distinction between the relation of cause and effect on the one hand and distinction between the relation of ground and consequence on the other. The first is factual and empirical, the second conceptual and logical. David Hume, one of the great British empiricists and probably the greatest philosopher to write in English, makes the former distinction. For him, the relation between cause and effect is not one that of necessity but that of contingency since he advocates the regularity view of causation according to which the regularity that obtains between cause and effect has only an inductive base. He holds the view that cause and effect are nothing but brute facts. The humean view is that the causal relation that holds between brute facts, that is, cause and effect, is logically independent of one another. On the other hand, the non-humean view about the relation between cause and effect is contrary to that of the humean view since it holds that cause and effect are conceptually connected. And this view does not regard causes and effects as brute facts but as grounds and consequences respectively. According to the non-humean view, 'causes' in human affairs are very different from 'causes' of natural events, and that the notion of ground is essentially connected to the idea of human action in terms of motive, intention, inclination, disposition, and so on. This sort of causal explanation is quasi-teleological, for it explains *explanans* and *explanandum* in terms of human action and purpose. It must be noted here that the role of causal explanation proper is often to link the non-humean causes of its *explanans* with the non-humean effects of its *explanandum*. Thus, for example, if the destruction of a particular city was an act of envy or revenge on the part of a neighbouring city, and if the destruction in turn became an economic disaster for the

entire region, it can be established that there is a connection between the rivalry of the two cities and subsequent changes in the economic life of the region. This is the kind of connection the historiographer is interested in. I would like to cite an instance from the history of North East India so as to focus this point a little more sharply. The Ahoms invaded the city of Dimapur with the explicit intention of expanding their kingdom. As a result, the city of Dimapur lost its level of civilisation, which it had achieved during the reign of the Kacharis. Thus it lost its pristine past glory.³ It would be, therefore, reasonable to infer that the economic life of the whole city also deteriorated to a great extent. It can be established that there is a connection between the invasion of the Ahoms and the deterioration of the economic life of the whole city. The following schematic picture⁴ may be used to bring out this point:



A somewhat different position is held in history by causal explanations of the *How possible?* type. For example, an archaeologist excavates a city and finds that big stones would be taken as an evidence that the people who lived in that city possessed some technological equipment or skill to transport these stones and raise them to their proper position in the wall. The possession of such a technological equipment or skill made it *causally possible* for them to achieve such feats. This explanation is genuinely causal since it depends for its validity on the existence of a nomic⁵ connection. Let me take a leaf out of a book on the history of North East India to highlight the same point. Brick buildings erected at Rangpur by Rudra Singh, an Ahom King, in the 15th century A.D. serve as excellent evidence of the fact that advanced technology or skill was acquired during that time. These buildings have

survived many an earthquake. These architectural wonders bear testimony to the fact that the mortar used to erect these buildings was of very high quality.⁶ The ability to make such mortar made it *causally possible* for the Ahoms to achieve dizzy heights in the field of architecture. This explanation too is truly causal, since it also depends for its validity on the existence of a nomic connection. What relevance causal explanations of this kind have to historiography? In order for this kind of causal explanations to have any relevance at all, their *explananda* must be the results of individual or collective action. When this condition is fulfilled, the relevance of the explanation lies in its giving an answer to the question how *actions* were possible (not why they were undertaken). This is no longer in terms of *humean* causation. Therefore, my answer to the question, 'Is there any room for genuine causal explanation in history?' is an emphatic *yes*.

There are some difficulties, some real and some alleged, that plague the pursuit of historical knowledge. These are: (1) A historical discourse can never be an exhaustive account of what actually happened because it selects and abstracts from the concrete occurrences studied. This position leads to the wholesale scepticism concerning the possibility of 'objective' explanation in historical matters. (2) Historical inquiry is selective not only in its starting point; it is also selective in proposing solutions to its problems. A variety of sceptical doubts about the possibility of an objective history has been expressed in consequence. One such doubt is based on the view that no account can render 'full reality' of what has occurred due to inexhaustibility of the numerous relations in which a given event stands to other events. Part of this doubt, that is, historical inquiry being selective in its starting point is selective in proposing solutions to its problems, can summarily be dismissed since unless an inquiry were selective it would never come near to resolving the specific question by which it is generated. This doubt also rests on another misconception, that is, it assumes that since every causal condition for an event has its own causal conditions, the event is never properly explained unless the entire regressive series of the latter conditions are also explained. There is no support for the claim that unless a series is terminated every

proposed solution to a given problem is necessarily a distortion of the truth.

Every cognitive claim concerning matters of vital human interest is said to be valid only within the particular social setting in which it emerges, and the belief that it is possible to obtain explanations that are 'true' for everyone, irrespective of his position in a given society, is declared to be part of the self-deception of a culture because the historian is biased by his unconscious value orientations, his religious commitments, and his political leanings. This sort of scepticism raises three distinct issues. These are: (1) the choice of a particular problem for study, especially that inquires into human affairs, is undoubtedly controlled by the character of a given culture, sometimes by the status of that inquirer in that culture. However, this form of selective activity on the part of an inquirer does not necessarily jeopardize the objectivity of his findings. (2) No inquiry takes place in an intellectual vacuum, and every investigator approaches his task with information and guiding ideas derived in large measure from his culture. But it does not follow from this that the value commitments of the investigator necessarily influence his acceptance of one conclusion rather than the other. In fact, there can be complete agreement among investigators despite their different social positions and loyalties. (3) The standards of validity operative in an inquiry are causally related to other cultural traits, and that social status, class and national bias, and general world perspectives more often than not influence what conclusion a man accepts. Biased thinking is a perennial challenge to the critical historian of human affairs: and research into causal determinants of bias is of great value of recognizing its occurrences and for mitigations, if not always eliminating its influences. This shows that objective explanation in history is not completely hopeless.

It must be noted here that though the radical scepticism rejects objective explanations of human affairs, it does concede the possibility of 'relational' type of objectivity because the investigators apply the same conceptual and *categorical* apparatus.

The search for explanations is directed to the ideal of ascertaining the necessary and sufficient conditions for the

occurrence of phenomena. This ideal is rarely achieved even in the best-developed natural sciences. Most, if not all, historical inquiry is even further removed from this ideal due to the complexity and numerosity of the circumstances. Therefore, historians frequently cite only what they regard as the 'main', 'primary', 'principal', 'chief' or 'most important' causal factor. The truth of such statements is debatable, but none will say that they are without meaning. It is desirable, therefore, on the part of the historians to make explicit what such statements may be intended to convey.

Perhaps the most perplexing philosophical problem of history is this: can man, after all, achieve any sort of objective or verifiable knowledge about human affairs since his thoughts or judgements about its very nature, as well as his explanations of it, seem always to be coloured or distorted by his social status and objectives, what he wants and hopes to be the case? Some idealistic philosophers like Benedetto Croce⁷ and R.G. Collingwood,⁸ and more recently many an existentialist philosopher, have argued in the following manner. The historian deals with data which have meaning for him only in so far as he re-thinks and re-lives them in some emphatic fashion or builds them into his own individual or social experience in some other way. Therefore, the historian does not achieve objective or scientific truth in the determination of facts since he picks and selects only the ones that have meaning or value for him and an understanding of which may help him solve his life problem. Moreover, these philosophers claim that historical interpretation of facts are myths, and not scientific explanations. A myth, they point out, however is not a falsehood but a value interpretation put upon the facts which has, for the historian who supplies the myth, and for others with his value orientation, the greatest truth possible. According to these thinkers, the same facts can be given different value interpretations, and thus conflicting myths emerge. For them history, thus is constantly rewritten for every generation that departs, however, slightly, from the value orientation of the previous ones. It is no exaggeration to say that historical knowledge regarded this way turns out to be entirely relative.

It is true that history has to be rewritten so as to suit the aspirations and hopes of each generation. It must be noted

here that this method belittles the importance of facts, and that it makes values entirely relative and subjective. This method is against the continuity of historical explanations. But the task of the historiographers is to maintain and preserve the continuity of historical inquiry so as to have a holistic account of such an inquiry. And this continuity sustains and preserves the relative objectivity of the historical enterprise without ignoring the significance of historical facts. Moreover, unless there is continuity in historical account, it would not be possible to discover or rediscover anything about the past. To sum up: I have tried to establish the following in this paper: (1) there is no radical difference between the explanations in natural sciences and the explanations in history, (2) there is room for genuine causal explanations in history, and these causal explanations are quasi-teleological in nature, (3) though absolute objectivity is not obtainable in history, it is possible to have relative objectivity in history, and (4) continuity in history is a must in order to discover or rediscover the truth about the past.

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