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125/L/89, FF104, GOVIND NAGAR, KANPUR U.P. INDIA ZIP 208006

www.kanpurhistorians.org

dadajhansi@gmail.com

+91 941-555-7103

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Contributors may mail the soft copy of articles and essays to
dadajhansi@gmail.com
Purushottamsingh_kn02@csjmu.ac.in

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Managing Editor

New Archaeological & Genological Society
125/L/89, FF 104, Govind Nagar
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Editorial

There are many claimants to the past – cultural memory, historical memory and history as a knowledge discipline. Cultural memory is given a long antiquity and traditions are used many times to justify hoary past of cultural identity of particular groups and their relations with the other groups. However as Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger have shown in the book, *Invention of Traditions*, some of these cultural traditions are actually of recent origins. Moreover, there are many cultural memories which are not only of recent origins but actually are products of various historical constructions, which can be called as historical memory. Prachi Deshpande's work on the making of Maratha identity titled as *Creative Past...* is a good oeuvre on the way history-writing, especially the *Bakhar* genre of historical writing was used to create Maratha Identity politics in the 20th century.

This tension between tradition and historical memory on the one hand and current trends in historical practices on the other has thrown many challenges to professional historians. One of the outcomes of these tensions is the question mark over the utilities of history as a knowledge discipline. Accusation from some quarters that all histories that have been written since colonial times are distortion of 'our' true 'national past' finds resonance in many quarters. Colonial historiography and social science approach of history inspired to an extent by Marxist methods are declared harshly as conjoint twins. This is despite of the fact that many scholars acknowledge that recent scholarly contributions of social science influenced historical writings on early India, such as *Past Before Us*, *Historical Tradition in Early India* have rescued Indian historical consciousness from the clutches of Colonial historiography which had periodized Indian history to ancient, medieval India on communal line, accepted only linear time and external historical consciousness. Many of the writings of last 50 years have contradicted claims of the nationalist history writings written during the national movement or in the post Independence period. One drawback of the Marxist historiography is the primary value it attaches to a set of social relations in the production process disregarding other factors that may have shaped up past, such as role concepts like dharma, punya, mlecchas, etc. might have played in shaping social and cultural relations. The same to logic can be applied to medieval modern historiography. Aligarh, JNU and DU historians used concepts and historical theories that located and explained social relations from the perspective of production process and power relations emerging and sustaining them than from other vantage points which may have played important roles in forming historical memory regarding relations between subject population and power groups. Given

the fact history writing has largely been intertwined with the projects of nation-states, historians today face many challenges, including that of being called anti national. As Prasenjit Duara writes the 'nation as the locus of history, if for no other reason than that our values, whether as historians or individuals, have been intimately shaped by the nation-state' and hence, a particular kind of national history backed by nation-state, is contrary to critical narratives of the past that emerged in the last 50 years. However, one can discern a certain political ideological bias of the historians which led them to the construction of historical events in a particular way. For example, the Subaltern historiography emerges out of the ideological belief which makes a critique of and calls for the liquidation of nation-state. These critical formulations are against the grain of the nation-state and hence one witnesses an acrimonious tension between critical history and national narratives.

Journals and journal writings operate within the canons of disciplinary practices. Nevertheless, the conceptual categories employed by historians to construct the past make one genre of historical writing different from the other. Obviously many peer reviewed journals adhere to these scholarly norms. Developing a major argument based on rigorous use of available sources forms the bedrock of disciplinary history. Selectively choosing sources disregarding other available sources which are contrary to one argument – selective omission – is contrary to historian's practices. Peer review brings in rigour to the disciplinary practices. Developing historical narratives based on theories and evidence is what makes history writing such a dynamic discipline. Nevertheless, if one evaluates all issues of the past from the perspective of national history and collective self, then the future of journals and pursuit of knowledge will be in danger.

The collection of articles in this issue of the journal brings to light the history of various geographical domains hitherto neglected, such as the privilege accorded to Malguzars in early land settlements in central Indian districts of Betul, Sagar, Jabalpure and how it resulted in a rackrented peasantry and the dominance of Marwari businessman in these districts. The first article deals on the Narmadanchal and state formation in this region in medieval times. The linear evolution of positivist historiography from tribe to state is actually refuted from many examples of state formation in tribal societies in medieval India, including of state formation by the Gonds in the form of Garh Katang in the time Akbar. Many tribals societies reveal social, political and economic differentiation and force us to understand notion of tribe in the past and present. There are eight articles in this summer issue.

Nandita Banerjee's article on the landed proprietary class of Maratha Malguzars deals with the relations of this landed proprietor class with the Raj on the one hand as well as their emergence as an exploitative class in the rural countryside of central India in Betul, Sagar, Jabalpure and Narsinghpur districts

of in colonial period. The British revenue officials preferred to enter into revenue relations with traditional landed proprietors of village, i.e malguzars and bestowed landlord right by inventing traditional landed proprietors in central India, resulting in the growth of absentee landlordism aka malguzari in central India. The estate emerged as a field for the extension of their grain and money lending business. Commercialization of agriculture, rail and road networks helped them further capture the grain market and increased their profit, including efforts for increasing area under their home farm. Concomitant to this, one witnessed greater propensity on the part of the traditional peasant class, such as kurmis, Jats, who emerged as a more vicious land sharks ejecting poor peasants from land so that they benefit from commercialization. Revenue settlement with malguzars, and Commercialization of agriculture hence reconfigured land and social relations at the expense of poor peasants leading to emergence of invented Maratha lord, exploitative peasant proprietor class and money lending Banias. However, the initial revenue assessment with Malguzars was so high that one sees frequent failure on the part of Malguzars to pay the assessed amount and therefore, as in Bengal and Odisha Permanent settlement area, one sees frequent transfer of proprietary rights till 1850s when increasing agricultural prices and falling real revenue assessment proved the assessment less burdensome. However, by 1860s and 1870s, land-proprietorship had already passed on to traders and money lenders who benefitted from commercialization.

Reyaz Ahmed Khan's article tries to retrieve the silent voices of history from the vernacular hagiographical tradition of Vaisnavas in the 17th century in the Vraj area. It analyses *Chaurasi Vaishnav ki Varta*, a hagiographical account to understand social relations in Vraja in 17th century. However the article ended up in narrating social customs such as sati, polygamy, concubine, superstition apart from glimpses of other cultural practices.

Mahendra Singh Vist's article on Nana Saheb brought to light new aspects of Nana's life in his last years and controversies relating to his death. In this regard, the author brings to light archival records from UP Secretariat to make the claim that Nana Saheb was alive in India and not in Nepal or Tibet and spent last years in Kashi.

William Dalrymple's article is brief review of recent scholarship on the circularity and cross cultural transaction involving trade, religion, language, etc in the medieval Indian Ocean. Rather than treating landmasses of the Indian Ocean from the nation-state perspectives, recent scholarship has emphasized on treating Indian ocean as a distinct cultural space regulated to an extent by the rhythm of monsoon. M. Firdausi's write-up on the micro region of Goalpara in Assam explores the emergence of this strategic micro-region as centre of salt, timber and jute trade in the 19th century colonial Assam and changes in its spatiality and direction of trade involving Assam, Bhutan, Hills of Northeast and Bengal.

Freedom struggle in Kanpur (1885 – 1920) by Jitendra Singh documents the development of mass organization in Kanpur during the Non-cooperation movement. It brought out the social support base of various leaders, especially between Swarajist and future Communist.

One interesting article in this journal issue is the article by Sharafuddin on bounty killing in colonial times. Examining the hunting expeditions of colonial administrators, the article examines the hidden nature of colonial wildlife policies and formulation of forest policies in the last quarter of the 19th century and first quarter of the 20th century. Such colonial intervention altered forest ecology.

Umakanta Mishra

Ravensha University, Cuttack India

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