

UNIT 2

PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Philosophy of history, the study either of the historical process and its development or of the methods used by historians to understand their material. The phrase “Philosophy of history” means historical explanation of historical happenings. There are atleast four different meanings of the term “philosophy of history”:- 1) it relates to the fundamental assumption a historian makes regarding particular historical processes like causation, progress etc; 2) it means historical methodology and the actual process of historical research and writing; 3) it is concerned with high level theorizing about the fundamental currents of history; and 4) it means discovery of general laws governing the course of events narrated by history.

CAUSATION OF THEORY IN HISTORY

The term “cause” is derived from the Latin word “Causa” which means “a relation of connectedness between events”. It indicates how a certain result, situation or event happens. It is one of the factors which help to explain why a historical event took place. It is a tool useful for the performance of the historian’s task of narrating the events of the past. Causation is one of the ancient beliefs acquired by men after centuries of tentative formulation. Plato and Aristotle thought in terms of eternal recurrences of events. The concepts of ancient Hindus centred round the idea of an unchanging ultimate reality with the idea of changing yugas, one following the other in a circle.

HERODOTUS

Herodotus was born in about 485 B.C. in the Greek city of Halicarnassus, a lively commercial center on the southwestern coast of Asia Minor. He came from a wealthy and cosmopolitan Greek-Carian merchant family. (The Carians, of Minoan descent, had arrived in that part of Asia Minor before the Greeks had.) In the middle of the 6th century B.C., Halicarnassus became a satrapy, or province, of the Persian Empire and was ruled by the tyrant Lygdamis. Herodotus' family opposed Lygdamis' rule and was sent into exile on the island of Samos. Herodotus was a wide traveler. His longer wandering covered a large part of the Persian Empire. He journeyed up the Hellespont (now Dardanelles) to Byzantium, went to Thrace and Macedonia, and traveled northward to beyond the Danube and to Scythia eastward along the northern shores of the Black Sea as far as the Don River and some way inland. These travels would have taken many years.

Herodotus's subject in his *History* is the wars between Greece and Persia (499–479 BCE) and their preliminaries. As it has survived, the *History* is divided into nine books (the division is not the author's): Books I–V describe the background to the Greco-Persian Wars; Books VI–IX contain the history of the wars, culminating in an account of the Persian king Xerxes' invasion of Greece (Book VII) and the great Greek victories at Salamis, Plataea, and Mycale in 480–479 BCE. There are two parts in the *History*, one being the systematic narrative of the war of 480–479 with its preliminaries from 499 onward (including the Ionian revolt and the Battle of Marathon in Book VI), the other being the story of the growth and organization of the Persian Empire and a description of its geography, social structure, and history.

Herodotus was a great traveler with an eye for detail, a good geographer, a man with an indefatigable interest in the customs and past history of his fellow citizens, and a man of the widest tolerance, with no bias for the Greeks and against the barbarians. He was neither naive

nor easily credulous. It is that quality that makes the first half of his work not only so readable but of such historical importance. In the second half he is largely, but by no means only, writing military history, and it is evident that he knew little of military matters. Herodotus hazarded his travels with insatiable thirst of knowledge and “observed and enquired with the eye of the scientist and the curiosity of a child”. Armed with a rich assortment of notes concerning the geography, history and manners of the people, which he meticulously and methodically collected during his far-reaching travels, he composed his monumental Histories. Herodotus was the first of Greek, and so of European, historians. His work is not only an artistic masterpiece; for all his mistakes (and for all his fantasies and inaccuracies) he remains the leading source of original information not only for Greek history of the all-important period between 550 and 479 BCE but also for much of that of western Asia and of Egypt at that time.

THUCYDIDES

Thucydides was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Son of a rich Athenian owner of gold mines in Thrace.,Athens. He was brought up in an environment of Greek enlightenment and skepticism. At the age of 36 he was chosen one of the two generals to command a navel expedition to Thrace. Because of his failure to relieve Amphipolis in time from the Spartan siege he was exiled. Like Herodotus he spent the next couple of decades in travel, especially in the Peloponnesus. Soon after the oligarchic revolution in 404 B.C. he returned to Athens. Thucydides died, some say murdered, in 396, leaving unfinished his monumental work, History of the Peloponnesian War.

Thucydides was himself an intellectual of the Athenian kind; markedly individualistic, his style shows a man brought up in the company of Sophocles and Euripides, the playwrights, and the philosophers Anaxagoras, Socrates, and the contemporary Sophists. His writing is condensed and direct, almost austere in places, and is meant to be read rather than delivered orally. He

explains in a scientific and impartial manner the intricacies and complexities of the events he observed.

LIVY

Livy, Latin in full **Titus Livius**, (born 59/64 BC, Patavium, Venetia [now Padua, Italy]—died AD 17, Patavium), with Sallust and Tacitus, one of the three great Roman historians. His history of Rome became a classic in his own lifetime and exercised a profound influence on the style and philosophy of historical writing down to the 18th century. Livy was a voluminous writer. He wrote his *Ab urbe Condita* or “From the City’s Foundation” in 142 books! Only 35 of them have survived in 6 volumes. His *Magnum Opus* was meticulously planned and majestically executed. Apparently it was published in parts, each with a separate title and all under the general heading. In his inimitable preface he says that “I wish to write the history of the Roman people from the foundation of the city to my own foundation of the Eternal City in 753 B.C . to the death of Druses in 09 A.D. since his premature demise deprived him from continuing the narration till the end of the reign of Emperor Augustus Caesar. In composing this monumental history Livy thoroughly and critically studied the earlier works, archival records and private collections. His stupendous task was to assemble the traditional records of early Roman history and welded them together into a single continuous narrative history of Rome. It was the first time anything of the sort has been done”. Livy was unique among Roman historians in that he played no part in politics. This was a disadvantage in that his exclusion from the Senate and the magistracies meant that he had no personal experience of how the Roman government worked, and this ignorance shows itself from time to time in his work. The work of a candid man and an individualistic thinker, Livy’s history was deeply rooted in the Augustan revival and owed its success in large measure to its moral seriousness. But the

detached attempt to understand the course of history through character (which was to influence later historians from Tacitus to Lord Clarendon) represents Livy's great achievement. The history of Rome as narrated by Livy was considered by the Romans as ecumenical or universal history.

TACITUS

Tacitus, in full **Publius Cornelius Tacitus**, or **Gaius Cornelius Tacitus**, (born AD 56—died c. 120), Roman orator and public official, probably the greatest historian and one of the greatest prose stylists who wrote in the Latin language. Among his works are the *Germania*, describing the Germanic tribes, the *Historiae* (*Histories*), concerning the Roman Empire from AD 69 to 96, and the later *Annals*, dealing with the empire in the period from AD 14 to 68. Tacitus, “the most brilliant of historians” leaves no traces about his date or place of birth, nor even his given name. Son of Cornelius Tacitus, Procurator of imperial revenue in Belgic Gaul, he should have received sound education and learnt to the full oratorical arts which enliven his style. In 98 Tacitus wrote two works: *De vita Julii Agricolae* and *De origine et situ Germanorum* (the *Germania*), both reflecting his personal interests. The *Historiae* began at January 1, 69, with Galba in power and proceeded to the death of Domitian, in 96. The work contained 12 or 14 books (it is known only that the *Histories* and *Annals*, both now incomplete, totaled 30 books). Tacitus has been rightly praised for his character drawing. His remarkable breadth of view is revealed in his praising the German power of resisting Rome. He often cites and sometimes critically examines his sources – Histories, speeches, letters and traditions of old families.