

***MARXIST SCHOOL OF INDIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY***

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**ABSTRACT:-**

In this paper I have tried to analyze the Marxist school of Indian historiography. Marxist School is one of the important Schools of Historiography of India. One should not be under impression that the historians belonging to this School were Marxists. These historians rather adopted the method of Karl Marx for interpreting and subsequently writing history. Marxist Historians in a way believed that political and historical events result from the 191 Nationalist and Marxist School conflict of social forces and are interpretable as a series of contradictions and their solutions and the main reason behind the conflict is material needs. The Marxist School historians gave emphasis on reading the historical sources from new angle i.e. Marxist angle or dialectical materialism by posing new questions and seeking their answers.

In India Marxist historiography takes the form of Marxian historiography where Marxian techniques of analysis are used but Marxist political intentions and prescriptions are discarded. B. N. Datta, and D. D. Kosambi are considered the founding fathers of Marxist historiography in India. D. D. Kosambi was apologetic of the revolution of Mao and thought of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's policies as pro-capitalist. Kosambi, a polymath, viewed Indian History from a Marxist viewpoint. The other Indian scholars of Marxian historiography are R. S. Sharma, Irfan Habib, D. N. Jha, and K. N. Panikkar. Other historians such as Satish Chandra, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, Arjun Dev, and Dineshchandra Sircar, are sometimes referred to as "influenced by the Marxian approach to history."

**Keywords:** History, Indian, Historiography, Marxist

**INTRODUCTION:-**

Marxist School is one of the important School of Historiography of India. One should not be under impression that the historians belonging to this School were Marxists. These historians rather adopted the method of Karl Marx for interpreting and subsequently writing history. Marxist Historians in a way believed that political and historical events result from the 191 Nationalist and Marxist School conflict of social forces and are interpretable as a series of contradictions and their solutions and the main reason behind the conflict is material needs. The Marxist School historians gave emphasis on reading the historical sources from new angle i.e. Marxist angle or dialectical materialism by posing new questions and seeking their answers.

**VIEWPOINT OF MARXIST SCHOOL:-**

In India Marxist historiography takes the form of Marxian historiography where Marxian techniques of analysis are used but Marxist political intentions and prescriptions are discarded. B. N. Datta, and D. D. Kosambi are considered the founding fathers of Marxist historiography in India. D. D. Kosambi was apologetic of the revolution of Mao and thought of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's policies as pro-capitalist. Kosambi, a polymath, viewed Indian History from a Marxist viewpoint. The other Indian scholars of Marxian historiography are R. S. Sharma, Irfan Habib, D. N. Jha, and K. N. Panikkar. Other historians such as Satish Chandra, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, Arjun Dev, and Dineshchandra Sircar, are sometimes referred to as "influenced by the Marxian approach to history."

The Marxian historiography of India has focused on studies of economic development, land ownership, and class conflict in precolonial India and deindustrialization during the colonial period. One debate in Indian history that relates to a historical materialist scheme is on the nature of feudalism in India. D. D. Kosambi in the 1960s outlined the idea of "feudalism from below" and "feudalism from above". Element of his feudalism thesis was rejected by R. S. Sharma in his monograph Indian Feudalism (2005) and various other books, However R. S. Sharma also

largely agrees with Kosambi in his various other books. Most Indian Marxian historians argue that the economic origins of communalism are feudal remnants and the economic insecurities caused by slow development in India.

The Marxian school of Indian historiography is accused of being too ideologically influenced. Though influenced by Marxist theory B. R. Ambedkar criticized Marxists, as he deemed them to be unaware or ignorant of the specifics of caste issues. Also though most criticisms of Marxian historiography is levied by people who are not historians, some historians have debated Marxian historians and critically examined their analysis of the history of India.

#### **EMINENT MARXIST SCHOOL SCHOLARS/HISTORIANS:-**

Prominent Marxist School historians Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi (D.D. Kosambi) is considered as the main torchbearer of Marxist School of Indian Historiography. He was born on 31 July 1907 in Goa. D. D. Kosambi's father was also academician. D. D. Kosambi was a great intellectual who was scholar in various subjects such as Mathematics, Statistics, German language, etc. He had worked as Professor of Mathematics in Fergusson College, Pune and other premier institutes like Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai. He was educated abroad as well in the institutes like Harvard, United States.

Later on Kosambi turned towards study of History. He started his historical studies with numismatics. He is aptly called as the doyen of Marxist School Indian Historiography. His famous works on history include: An Introduction to the Study of History, The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline, Exasperating Essays: Exercises in Dialectical Method, Myth and Reality: Studies in the Foundation of Indian Culture, etc.

Kosambi was of the view that the traditional European style or method of history writing would not be useful in case of India, especially ancient period. This is the case because there was lack

authentic sources which is the mainstay of Western style of history writing. According to him the study of tools developed by human being at various stages of life in order to earn livelihood and advance the lifestyle can be verifiable and would be reliable source for history writing, particularly the period of pre-history. It can be seen that Karl Marx more or less had made same type of observations. According to this School there is a close connection between the means of production and social organisation of human kind.

Kosambi extensively made use of archaeological remains found in India for reconstructing or writing the ancient history of India. Archaeological remains such as graves, houses, instruments of production, caves, etc. are excavated from various sites in India. These remains were exploited by him for arriving at conclusions. He made use of comparative and interdisciplinary method for his interpretations. He had the knowledge of Sanskrit knowledge as well which helped him in interpreting the Sanskrit texts and draw conclusions. He also fixed the dates of punch marked coins of ancient India with the help of his expertise on the subject of Mathematics. He has explained the travel of tribal life to caste formations. And the economic or agricultural tool like plough might have played an important role in it. He has opined that during ancient times the non Brahmanical elements might have got assimilated into Brahmanical culture and would have resulted into the process of Sanskritisation. Kosambi has put forward various interpretations about the Indus Valley Civilization, Aryan and Non-Aryan relations as well as rise of religions like Buddhism and Jainism. According to him changes in technology, detribalization and rise of urban centers offer the economic background or explanation of birth of Buddhism and Jainism during ancient India.

After reading the works of D. D. Kosambi one has to accept the fact that he was the great intellectual and employed the knowledge of subjects like Mathematics and Sanskrit in history writing beautifully. Of course, as time passes some of his theories and interpretations might be

challenged in the light of new evidences and sources but his works will definitely help and inspire the future historians.

**ROMILA THAPAR :-**

Romila Thapar is another important historian belonging to Marxist School of Historiography. She was educated from Punjab University and School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. She is also the recipient of prestigious American Kluge Prize in recognition of her contribution in the subject of history.

The important works of Romila Thapar, especially on the history of Ancient India include: Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas, Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations, Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History (Ed.), History of India Volume One and Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300. In her celebrated work Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas Thapar has given the indepth analysis of the reign of Mauryan Emperor Asoka. She in this work has made a point that in order to keep intact the vast and diverse empire if the Mauryas there was a need of strong concept of state and nationalistic feelings. One can say that Romila Thapar does the scholarly interpretation of the historical facts and sources. In 'History of India Volume One' she has made a point that the political events and economic and social events are related to each other.

Economic changes or changes in economic structure influence the social relationships as well as political developments. Not only so Romila Thapar while describing the political history has beautifully explained the interrelationships between religion, economic, social, artistic and literary aspects. 'Ancient Indian Social History' is another excellent work of Romila Thapar in which she has talked about various aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism. In this book she has also talked about the origin of caste system and says that the caste system might have originated in Harrapan culture only. In 'Interpreting Early India' she has questioned the stereotypes about the

theory of Aryan race and absolute use of political power by the rulers. She has systematically proved that there was rise of urban centers and flourishing trade during ancient times.

**R. S. SHARMA:-**

Ram Sharan Sharma was the historian of international repute known for his Marxist method. He was born in Barauni. He used to teach in Patna and Delhi University and also was Visiting Faculty at University of Toronto. He was also the Senior Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). The prominent works of R. S. Sharma include: 'Sudras in Ancient India', 'Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India', 'India's Ancient Past', 'Early Medieval Indian Society: A Study in Feudalisation', 'Urban Decay in India c. 100 to c. 1000', 'Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Ancient India' among others.

In 'Sudras in Ancient Past' R. S. Sharma has explained that the skills of Sudras and the profits created by the Viasyas played important role in the development during ancient times. He has also argued that in the earlier phase i.e. during Early Vedic times the Indian society was tribal and pastoral and later on it got converted into class based society. In this book he has thrown light on the different transformations which took place in the life and status of Sudras at different times in ancient period.

In 'Indian Feudalism' he has pointed out that the political nature of Indian feudalism can be understood by studying the land revenue systems and other aspects related to land. In 'Urban Decay in India' R. S. Sharma argues that during the period of 200 BC to 300 AD the urbanisation was at its peak. Later on the process of decline in the towns started and according to him the main cause responsible for it was the decline in the trade with far off empires. This first cycle of decline in urbanisation was set in after sixth century of Common Era. 'Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India' is another classic work of R. S. Sharma and the Marxist method is greatly applied in the analysis and arriving at conclusions in it. In this book he has

explained the reason behind the creation of varna system. Apart from it he gives many other economic examples which influenced the society and overall social organisation in ancient India. The title 'Light on Early Indian Society and Economy' itself is an indicator to the Marxist method of writing.

**BIPAN CHANDRA:-**

Bipan Chandra was born in 1928 in Kangra. He was specialist in Modern Independence Movement of India and also Mahatma Gandhi. He was educated at Stanford University among others. The prominent works of Bipan Chandra include: 'The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism', 'Nationalism and Colonialism in India', 'India's Struggle for Independence' and 'Communalism in Modern India' among others. Bipan Chandra has commented on the Indian Capitalism and Indian Capitalist class and its nature in his 'Nationalism and Colonialism'. Bipan Chandra agrees with the Marxist view that Communalism in India is the one of the results of the Colonialism. In his book titled 'The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism', Chandra has analysed the economic nationalism of Indian National Movement.

**IRFAN HABIB:-**

Irfan Habib was born in 1931 in Vadodara in educated and affluent family. He was educated from Aligarh Muslim University and also Oxford University. He is perhaps the most famous Marxist School historian specialising in the history of Medieval India. His father Mohammad Habib was also historian.

Some of the important works of Irfan Habib include: 'Interpreting Indian History', 'Caste and Money in Indian History', 'Problems of Marxist Historiography', 'The Agrarian System of Mughal India', 'An Atlas of the Mughal Empire' and 'The Cambridge Economic History of India' (Co-editor- Tapan Chaudhuri).

In his 'Interpreting Indian History' Habib says that the historian should give emphasis on interpreting the historical facts, instead of just narrating it. In this book he has also explained the newly formed social organisation after the Ghurid and Turkish invasions. In order to analyse it

he has made use of various aspects such as slavery, serfdom, wage labour, surplus value in the form of rent and profit and the system of distribution of surplus.

It can be said that the most important point made by Irfan Habib in 'The Agrarian System of Mughal India' was his analysis of the contradiction in social formation in Mediaeval India. In this context he says that it lies between the central political power i.e. state and the class of peasants. The same contradiction could be witnessed vis-a-vis state and the class of zamindars. The demand for increased revenue was the most important reason behind the conflict between the state, zamindars and peasantry. 'An Atlas of the Mughal Empire' is the classic work of historical cartography. Irfan Habib has not only produced the historical maps in this great work but also has given the analysis in the form of notes. It can be considered as one of the rare books on historical maps written by Indian Historian. 'Caste and Money in Indian History' is the work trying to interpret the caste. In this book it has been brought out that this division of labour based on caste mainly benefitted the nobility and zamindars during mediaeval period. As the title indicates Irfan Habib has tried to analyse the Marxist Historiography in critical manner in 'Problems of Marxist Historiography'. 'The Cambridge Economic History of India', (Volume 1, 1200-1750) is of course, the interpretation of agrarian economy of medieval period by keeping in mind the common people and importantly the peasantry.

**SUMMARY:-**

One can arrive at the conclusion that the Marxist School definitely is one of the important Schools of Indian historiographies. It has given a new vision of writing history. D. D. Kosambi can be called as the Father of this School and this School produced many other prominent historians from India viz. R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, Irfan Habib, etc. The Marxist School preferred to give emphasis on writing history from economic and social aspects. The Marxist School also gives importance to make use of facts and knowledge from other disciplines such as Sociology, Anthropology and also Statistical data wherever possible. It also

laid emphasis on trying to explain and analyse the origin of various human institutions developed in the course of human history. Yet another feature of Marxist School is that it made use of archaeological as well as primary sources for writing history. The Marxist Historians of India have rejected and also tried to prove wrong the western stereotype opinions about India and growth of Indian society historically, especially in context with the economic activity and the process of urbanisation and the so-called concept Asian mode of production. Judged by any measure one has to conclude that the contribution of Marxist School is immense to the Indian historiography.

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**BIO:-**

Dr. Y. Samuel. Wesley is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of History at Smt. Chandibai Himathmal Mansukhani College, Ulhasnagar, India. He is also the In Charge of Foundation Course and the Co-ordinator of Travel and Tourism Add On Course. His doctoral dissertation was titled 'Pandita Ramabai, Anandibai Joshi and Tarabai Shinde: A Comparative Study'. He is a member of the Global Research Development Services. He has presented papers at various national and international seminars. He has completed three minor research projects dealing with certain facets of theological history in India as well as Gender History. He has been teaching undergraduate and post graduate students and is as a recognized Ph.D Guide as well.