

INTRODUCTION

History is a most important branch of knowledge. It forms an integral part of human life as man is eager by nature to be cognizant of the past events and more particularly the whereabouts of his ancestors and predecessors. The study of history helps man derive lesson from the past and opens up new vistas for his progress in future. It also brings freshness and adds new dimensions to man's life. A person, unmindful of history, is deprived of the real joy of life. An Arab poet is quite right in saying :

مَنْ لَمْ يَلِجِ السَّيْرَ فِي صَدْرِهِ
لَمْ يَدْرِ حُلُوقَ الْحَيَاتِ مِنْ مَرِّهِ
وَمَنْ وَ عَلَى أَخْبَارِ مَنْ قَدْ مَضَى
أَضَافَ أَحْمَارًا إِلَى عُمْرِهِ

"He in whose heart no History is enscrolled,
cannot discern in life's alloy the gold,
But he that keeps the records of the Dead,
Adds to his life new lives a hundred fold."

Tarikh or History:

Opinions are divided as to the origin of the term "tarikh". According to Al-Kāfījī and Al-Sakhāvi, it is an arabicised loan word from Persian māh (moon) rōz (day)¹. Throwing light on its origin

¹ See Al-Kāfījī; Al-Mukhtasar Fi 'Ilm al-Tarikh p.472 and its English version p.183 in Rosenthal, Franz; A History of Muslim Historiography, Leiden, 1952. Also see Al-Sakhāvi; Al-Ilān bi al-tawbikh li-man Dhamma ahl al-Tarikh (English version) in "A History of Muslim Historiography" p.203.

al-Sakhāvi says that the Persian word māhrōz was arabicised as "mu'arrakh", and the infinitive "tarikh" was formed from it². Al-Jawāliqī opines that it is derived from the Syriac word for "month" (irah)³. Al-Asmāi and al-Jawhārī think that tarikh or tawrikh is of Arabic origin⁴. Making a dialectical distinction between 'arrakha and warrakha, al-Asmāi observes that the Banu Tamīm (a tribe of the Arabs) say: warrakhtu al-Kitāba tawrikhan (I made clear the time of writing of the letter or the book) whereas the Qays (another tribe of the Arabs) say: 'arrakhtuhū tarikhan⁵. Franz Rosenthal supposes it to be derived from the South Arabic form "tawrikh" whose root is "wrk"⁶. He further holds that the South Arabic root "rk" which served to express the idea of determining a document through the use of a date may also be the etymology of "tarikh"⁷.

As for the statement of al-Kāfiḡī and al-Sakhāvi that tarikh is an arabicised form of the Persian "māhrōz" or that "māhrōz" was arabicised as "murrah" from which the infinitive "tarikh" was formed, it has no sound ground as the root of tarikh or mu'arrakh and that of māhrōz seem to be entirely different.

Though it is very difficult to say a last word on the above opinions, the assumption that "tarikh" which means the indication

²Ibid p.312.

³See Margoliouth, D.S.; Lectures on Arabic Historians, Delhi, 1977, pp. 18, 33.

⁴See Al-Ilān (English version) in "A History of Muslim Historiography" p. 203.

⁵Ibid.

⁶See A History of Muslim Historiography p. 11. Also see Lectures on Arabic Historians, p. 18.

⁷Ibid.

of the time⁸ is of South Arabic origin appears more appropriate. This assumption gathers support from a Muslim tradition (reported by Ibn Abi Khaythamah through Muhammad b Sirin) which runs: "Someone arrived from the Yemen and said (to 'Umar, R.A.) that he had seen there something which was called by the Yemenites "tarikh" and they figure in their documents from a certain year and month. Whereupon 'Umar (R.A.) said: "This is fine. Let us institute an era ('arrikhū)".⁹

Another report also favours this assumption. The report says that Yala b-Umayyah, governor in the Yemen, wrote to 'Umar (R.A.) a letter that was dated (mu'arrakh). 'Umar (R.A.) liked it, and the Muslim rather Hijra era was instituted.¹⁰

The word "tarikh" does not occur in pre-Islamic literature, nor does it occur in the Qur'an and the Hadith. It is mentioned in Arabic literature first together with the stories of the introduction of the Muslim (Hijrah) era. And it was first used in the sense of assigning the date in letters and documents. Then, it acquired the meaning of "historical work" in the second century of the Hijrah (the eighth century A.D.) and that of "history" in the third century of the Hijrah (the ninth century A.D.).¹¹

⁸ See Ibn Manzur; Lisan al-Arab, Vol. III, Qum (Iran), 1405 A.H., p.4 and Lane, E.W. Arabic English Lexicon Vol. 1, Delhi, 1985, p.46.

⁹ See Al-Ilan (English version) in A History of Muslim Historiography, pp. 310-11.

¹⁰ Ibid p. 310. The Arabs had no permanent calendar in pre-Islamic times. But the custom of counting the year was prevalent among them. Its origin may be traced as back as to the construction of the Kabah by Ibrahim and his son, Ismail (A.S.). The permanent calendar was however, introduced into Arabia in 637/38 A.D. in the time of 'Umar (R.A.).

¹¹ For further details see A History of Muslim Historiography pp. 11, 12, 13, 14.

Definition of History:

There is divergence of opinion as to the definition of history. Each historian or scholar has defined it in his own way. The classical Arabic historiographers define it as 'knowledge pertaining to a country, customs and manners of a people, remains of the people of yore, as well as an account of the actions of those alive.'¹²

According to Ibn-Khaldūn (A.D. 1332-1406), it is no more than information about political events, dynasties, and occurrences of the remote past, elegantly presented and spiced with proverbs --- It shows how changing conditions affected (human affairs), how certain dynasties came to occupy an ever wider space in the world, and how they settled the earth until they heard the call and their time was up. The inner meaning of history involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events.¹³

Al-Kāfiḡī (1386-1474 A.D.) defines it as a branch of knowledge dealing with time sections (zaman) and their circumstances, as well as the circumstances of those which are connected with those time-sections with a view to their fixation as to time.¹⁴

According to al-Sakhāvi (1427-1497 A.D.), it signifies a branch of learning that is concerned with research regarding the occurrences which take place in time, in the intention to establish their

¹² See Fārūqī, N.A.; Early Muslim Historiography, Delhi, 1979, p. 2.

¹³ Ibn Khaldūn; Muqaddimah, Beirut, 1981, pp. 3-4. Also see its English translation by Frauz Rosenthal edited by N.J. Dawood, London, 1978, p. 5.

¹⁴ Al-Kāfiḡī; Al-Mukhtasar and its English translation in Rosenthal's "A History of Muslim Historiography" pp. 470, 182.

character and their place in time. In fact, it is concerned with everything that was (and is) in the world.¹⁵

According to another definition, History is tracing of those events and conditions which show the manner in which the present was sprung out of the past as an effect. As the civilization and social systems, the ideas and impression, and the religious orders which exist in the world at present, are the natural effects of past events, History is the investigation of those past events and their arrangement in such an order as will admit of a delineation of the manner in which each present event resulted from the chain of past events.¹⁶

By a most common definition, History means the past of mankind.

In John C.B. Webster's words, it is an unending conversation between the past and the present carried on through the examination of evidence and focussed upon concrete events and changes in the past.¹⁷

'History', says J. Burckhardt's, 'is the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another'.¹⁸

To Sir Charles Firth it is the record of the life of societies of men of the changes which those societies have gone through, of

¹⁵ Al-Sakhāvi; Al-Ilān (English translation) in "A History of Muslim Historiography", p. 205.

¹⁶ Shibli; Al-Farūq, Vol. I, Azamgarh, 1956, p. 9 and its English translation by Maulānā Zafar Ali, Lahore, 1939, p. 12.

¹⁷ See An Introduction to History, 1981, p. 15.

¹⁸ See his "Judgement on History and on Historians", 1959, p. 158.

the ideas which have determined the actions of those societies, and of the material conditions which have helped or hindered their development.¹⁹

History may briefly be defined as a branch of knowledge which investigates the past events, recording their dates and analysing their causes and effects.

¹⁹ See Rowse, A.L.; The Use of History, 1948, pp. 59, 60.