



NATION BUILDING THE ROLE OF HISTORY, HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORIANS

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Abstract

Some scholars outside historical scholarship view history as a past, that only has relevance when it is needed or 'past' that should totally be forgotten. Such people see these academic disciplines as archaic if not completely useless. Others hold it in low esteem. This may not only be seen as misconception of history, as a process and discipline, it has as well affected the unity, progress, peace and harmony of our beloved country and has as a result generated mutual mistrust, inter religious and communal conflicts. The study also examines the concept of history as a discipline, a science and a process of change, the term historiography, position of a historian and their tremendous contributions in nation building project. At the tail end, problems confronting historical studies, historian and centres for historical research and documentation have been highlighted and the study has in the same vain suggested a way forward.

Introduction

For a better understanding of the focus of the study it is important to note that it is an attempt to relate the past with the present economic, social, political and religious conditions aimed at understanding the fact that the role of history, historiography and historian in nation building cannot be over emphasized. Furthermore, a scholar in person of P.J. Shea has even opined that "Every person has a history, the more and the better we understand all these histories the better we shall all be". He views it this way, peace, unity, progress and nations building may best be achieved under the pretext of historical awareness, which deals with the conscious of the events that happen around.

The Concepts of History and Historiography

In the first place many definitions have been put forward at explaining the term "History" as an academic course of study.

In view of the basic reasons why we study history; this has made many scholars to argue that history is a process which involves interaction between man and man, man and his environment, man and the cosmic world, ever since the emergence of human societies which is still unfolding and has a time dimension. History as a process is defined as the conscious attempt to systematically study the process of events through the aid of sources. However, this portrays that the major goal of history is to justify human curiosity and provide the society with the opportunity to know itself better in respect of the past events, societies and cultures.

One of the major role of history in nation building is the reconstruction of record of the activities of man on earth, his religion, politics, economy, long existed inter group-relations, commercial contact and other aspects of human life. To a large extent, it is concerned with the study and reconstruction of the history of how and why change in the past, for the conscious transformation of the present in order to secure a meaningful future, moreover, conceptualized as the study of change for change.

Many historical studies conducted have proved that account of his method and purpose in writing his history, had made an impression upon even non-historians, which has never been effected. He had shown enormous pains in collecting and collating his evidence and has in general added the result; so far from commending his work to the casual reader; may prove positively distasteful to him, because it



bars out the pleasures of romancing. What further in respect of his historical write-ups motivate people until today to develop interest in historical scholarship is his precise and comprehensive methods of justification. For he views human experience repeats itself; that the future will be the past, and that consequently it is only by ascertaining accurately the courses not even the course of past events, that we may equip ourselves to future problems for the sake of nation building. He further argues that 'Truths' so established cannot be as showy as fictions, but rather represent a solid gain to humanity for all time i.e. past, present and future in general.

Furthermore, well-grounded historians such as D.W. Robertson and J. Higham here both agreed and emphasized that the study of history enriches human experiences, develops power of thinking and also generates new ideas that greatly contribute in nation building. They further opine that it is historical scholarship that promotes mutual understanding, as a result of understanding of the past. An indication to this is the properly reconstructed and documented history of Greenberg's Classification of African Languages which clearly shows the early existing tribal relationship between certain African languages, most especially the category of Kwasub-group, Congo-Kordofanian and Nilo Saharan.

The major role of historical sources in investigating, interpreting, reconstructing and understanding of the past event cannot be ignored. Prior to the examination of some of these sources, it is interesting to present scholars opinion as regards the position of history, Ibn Khaldun opines that the inevitability of change in the society involving the rise and fall of great empires, after attaining their full-life-circle. From the foregoing, it can be argued that the only thing that is permanent in history is change and such change can be gradual, rapid or revolutionary. Baradough views history as reconstruction based on fragmentary evidence, the significant things about the past. This clearly points out that it is not everything or every event of the past, that is being studied, but only those that have significant effects on subsequent course of events. On the other hand E.H. Carr states that history is the continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts and an unending dialogue between the past and present.

Historical Sources

The major sources that greatly contribute in making an examined historical event a reality include, geography, linguistic, oral traditions, primary and secondary sources, and archaeological sources, their importance in tracing an event, understanding and writing of history cannot be over-emphasized.

Geography and history are interwoven, the word 'Geo' (From the Greek means "earth" and "graphics" to write). Geography enables a historian to relate man with his physical environment at past stages of evolution, for it provides information regarding the patterns of settlement, economic development, rain, vegetation, wind and topography for historical examination, interpretation and construction.

Linguistic also as an essential source of historical data collection, this involves a way, in which ideas, emotions and desires are communicated. It clearly makes the understanding of societies possible most especially, if a study could be carried out under the pretext of comparative linguistics, dialectology or lexicon. This involved a way in which ideas, emotions and desires are communicated.

For oral sources/traditions it is a testimony transmitted verbally from one generation to another. This portrays that the message must be oral statements spoken, sung, or called out on musical instrument. However, prior to the invention of writing, oral sources served as means of preserving and transmitting history.



Similarly, primary and secondary sources are both referred to as written documents, known as inscriptions. The inscriptions includes: paper, wood, stone, leather and leaf. But written documents include; diaries, letters, memos, periodicals, annual reports, biographies, travelers accounts, correspondence, official and private minutes of various dealings, statistics and agreements they will provide information for documentation.

The last but not the least of the sources is archaeology which involves excavation, discovery and interpretation of the material remains. The discovered remains are called artifacts. The methods used in the explanation of the artifacts found is interdisciplinary and based on multi-faceted approaches and wide variety of sources.

History as a Science

The common conception of science involves the motion of accurate formulae, known as natural laws, giving accurate results derivable from these principles and this entails the criticism that as human action is infinitely variable, no certain result can be contained in a study established upon it. This theory seeks to confine history to narrative and refuse any attempt to discover any principles behind the drama. In pure sciences, scientist are aware of the limitations of their invariable laws and of the defects of their methods, and if they were to endeavour to exclude history from the sciences, they would probably base their exclusion upon the statement that the laws of human conduct are so imperfectly known that the methods employed in discussing them must be widely different from that they are accustomed to employ.

And yet economics, psychology and anthropology have one by one crept into the guarded circle, and it is difficult to state that history will not follow them and that historians may not look to their logic and try to establish their general principles as eagerly and as accurately as any other students. In any case, the determinist be left to the dominion of incalculable chance.

Even where the action of individual is incalculable, the action of the crowd may have a common direction and common aim. Buckle an erudite scholar who was described as the protagonist of all those historians and politicians of the past, who appealed to the known laws of history to support their own theories and to repel those of their opponents. Unaware like the men of his time, of the historians of natural laws in such studies as chemistry or physics he attempted to extend to history the certainty which he attributed to the other sciences. His work is ingenious, brilliant and perverse. But he never knew that before historians argue from the past, they must discover it.

The last but not the least is that the long prevailed intellectual arguments that history is a science can only be regarded as an inverse science; its adherents are continually employed in reasoning from what they know and see before them, to what they have never known and never can see. Whereas, in the case of all inverse sciences, it can be found that problems are capable of many solutions and the selection of the right answer from the many possible answers is at once the difficulty and the delight of the historians. In a nutshell, the historian from a set of facts presented to his consciousness, he is compelled to work backwards to a preceding set of facts which is purely hypothetical. The number of possible solutions in history is indefinite, the selection of the most acceptable one is the peculiar task to which he dooms himself, because history is a hypothesis to account for the existence of facts as they are.

The Historian and his Functions

For a better understanding of an individual refers to as a historian, it would also be more appropriate to examine the nature of the task ahead of him. A historian is a specialist trained on the techniques to



handle sources and ask critical questions such as why, how and with what form of academic justification and so forth. In historian's attempt to reconstruct the past, he does this because history is distinct from fiction, storytelling or literature. Historian also evaluates sources to establish authenticity and reliability of the information obtained, this is because all sources are suspects until proved otherwise.

Conclusion

This study has whole heartedly and unreservedly examined the meaning of the concepts of History, Historiography and Historian and their major contributions to the development of as a nation. It has further suggested that historical scholarship is the most essential ingredient that moves a country and its citizens forward through the understanding of the past for comparison with the present, even the future at large.

The study has also viewed it that most of the Nation ethnic and religious conflicts have occurred, and still happen as a result of the Nationelite' failure to understand Nation people, culture, pre-colonial, commercial and religious relationships under the pretext of historical studies. In view of the problems identified as obstacles currently facing historian, historical studies, historiography and centres for historical research such as National archives, museum and monuments, the study has in respect of this proffered ways forward.

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