



Environmental Changes: A Challenge to Archaeology and History

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Abstract

We should search for the social lineage that is preserved by the society and its culture to reconstruct the history of our past and to pave the smooth way for our present development as the past cannot be separated from the present state of the society by any means. This post-colonial approach to study of history almost provincialises the whole study among macro level and micro level analysis of the social past. Regarding the sustainable development of a contemporary society, micro level analysis of historical facts is indispensable today. In the study it has been seen that the economy of Sikkim has the twin characteristics of traditional and a modern economy. So far as the former is concerned it is mostly shaped and influenced by natural, mainly geographical and cultural factors. Therefore micro level study effectively helps to develop the socio-economic state of our contemporary society. This study became relevant mostly while we see that the impact of environmental degradation becomes alarming towards the existence of history. Since the historical monuments serve as an important historical source for understanding of the society, economy and political development as well of a concerned period, it is necessary to preserve these monuments to save our source of past. Different measures regarding preservation of such monuments in order to maintain sustainability of present development and to save the scope of reconstruction of history, some measures to be taken both at government and NGO level.

Key words- Environment, Pollution, Historical monuments, Morter,

Introduction

This utilitarian society often becomes concerned to focus on sustainability of this present system of living and for this reason it becomes our convention to arrange such scope of discussion. However, it is an appreciative job also since it generates a chance to bring the question of discussing of preserving the uniqueness of the past of our present. We should search for the social lineage that is preserved by the society and its culture to reconstruct the history of our past and to pave the smooth way for our present development as the past cannot be separated from the present state of the society by any means. There is of course such an underlying current of our civilisation of which we may be aware through the study of our previous architectural

development, along with the pre-colonial and colonial concept of livelihood. Therefore the preservation of our past and the impact of environmental degradation upon it should come under sharp consideration at government and individual level as well.

Material and Methods

This article I have prepared on the basis of survey report in the villages of Sikkim and the secondary sources of historical literatures which includes the philosophy of historical writings.

Discussion

To have an idea about what history speaks is to some extent essential in the context of writing of this paper. There is a great controversy among the stalwarts, at least at theoretical level, regarding this most fundamental question. History is the enquiry conducted by the historian and the series of the past events into which he enquires. The 'past' obviously to be mentioned, as a past is still living in the present¹ (Collingwood). It means interpretation. Interpretation is of the past events. Hence the interaction between the historian and the facts of the past is inevitable.² Carr's interpretation regarding history gives birth of the course of interpretation of writing history through various stage of development. From nineteenth century onwards the historians divided among themselves regarding the study of the writing of history. The structural analysis of the society gave birth of the historical discussion of the mainstream social facts. But the follies of such study were brought to light along with some contemporary as well as historical socio-economic unrest. Therefore, from this standpoint a new venture was discovered among the philosophers and historians that is micro-critical study of the society. This post-colonial approach to study of history almost provincialises the whole study among macro level and micro level analysis of the social past. Thus the centre-periphery debate concerning the study of history arose. As a matter of fact this debate pushes us forward for micro level analysis of fact or facts. It is not possible unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with those about which or whom he or she is writing. So it is an endeavour to break with the traditional institution of analysing the 'past' that is mainstream historical study, whereas '... the poststructuralist critique of western epistemology and theorisation of cultural alterity / difference is indispensable to postcolonial theory'³

Therefore the impetus of the micro-critical analysis of history is postcolonial in nature. There is no scope to deny the positive contribution to understanding the history and tradition of the marginal people. But the question may rise in this respect is that why we do study 'history' or 'micro history'; while it is well established conclusion that history teaches no lesson⁴. After the Renaissance in fourteenth century C.E. the utilitarian mentality in respect of education and learning emerged and this frame of mind is still in vogue. Thus society is also very much reluctant to spend its valuable times and resources for an unproductive issues. Therefore, it is our responsibility to motivate the learned people to dig up historical uniqueness of the past. Since macro level analysis of historical facts does not bring the small units of

civilisation under consideration which is necessary for pursuing the contemporary trend of development, the micro history is enough popular today. The large scale quantitative study often distorts reality on individual level. So to generate a widely acceptable conclusion to a greater number of populations, Geertz advocates the avenue of microscopic analysis⁵.

Why is micro history necessarily to be studied? According to Martin Bruegel, it is an alternative to the “big structure and larger process”⁶, though he is a critique of it. It is important to understand the intrinsic socio-economic relationship among the individuals, the state of technological knowledge and how the historical events shape the evolution of the economy. Regarding the sustainable development of a contemporary society, micro level analysis of historical facts is indispensable today. For example, “tourism had its inception in India since time immemorial. It belongs to a perpetual evolutionary history that has appended new dimensions and scales to it with the advancement of time. Beginning with mono-dimensional disposition (pilgrimage), it has significantly accomplished multi-dimensional essence in present century, for example, nature based tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism etc...Sikkim has become one of the popular tourist destinations in India and inevitably is susceptible to environmental sustainability. Keeping this point in view, this tiny state has started promoting village tourism. Such type of tourism is based on peoples’ participation approach where the local culture acts as the central resource of investment”.⁷ Regarding cultural tourism in Sikkim different traditional cultural groups and their activities can be experienced. The principal attraction of the tourists is the local and purely indigenous culture. Hence the local economy gets its stimulant from these traditional activities. 36% of total tourist personalities are attracted by this cultural tourism.⁸ For proper understanding of the sustainable development of modern Sikkim, we consider chiefly the tourism industry which is based on indigenous socio-economic culture. Significantly, the entire tourism programmes in these villages are performed by the villagers in a collective way through the CBO and whatever the profit is earned by the villagers is distributed among the participants by that CBO on the basis of their levels of participation. A fixed percentage of such profit is kept by the CBO for office fund to keep the whole system operating. On the other hand, the ownership of the tourism resources is basically collective which means individual ownership of tourism resources is neither claimed nor permissible. Therefore, the maintenance of such resources or the natural environment becomes the responsibility of the villagers.

It is clear from the above discussion that there are indeed some approach oriented resemblances in between the pre-colonial mode of production in rural India and the village tourism in Sikkim. Significantly in both approaches there is a strong correlation in terms of collective production or involvement, regulation through village councils or CBOs, the self-sufficiency, collective ownership of resources and above all the natural as well as cultural sustainability.⁹

In the study it has been seen that the economy of Sikkim has the twin characteristics of traditional and a modern economy. So far as the former is concerned

it is mostly shaped and influenced by natural, mainly geographical and cultural factors. Therefore micro level study effectively helps to develop the socio-economic state of our contemporary society. This discussion is relevant here in the sense that earthquakes, landslide, the environmental crisis with alarming pollution emission etc leads to destruction of tradition, displacement of settlement and hence destroying traditional past which might have come to serve our present complex objectives with simplicity like the tourism industry of Sikkim.

This study became relevant mostly while we see that the impact of environmental degradation becomes alarming towards the existence of history. Since the historical monuments serve as an important historical source for understanding of the society, economy and political development as well of a concerned period, it is necessary to preserve these monuments to save our source of past. But as a matter of fact, the natural calamities mostly occurred as the result of environmental pollution threatens the historical monuments and the settlements historically important. Earthquakes, landslide, rise of sea level, degradation of soil etc. are frequent in most of the countries in the world today and these cause large scale destruction of cultural, historical, religious monuments and hence abolishing the sources of historical reconstruction of our society, economy and the cultural aspects as well. Humidity is also a major cause to the damage of a monuments and it affects adversely the base of the construction. Intrusion of humidity through the damage coverings also cause damage and the accumulated humidity form in the holes in the walls and id frozen in the winter, melted in the spring and destroy the mortar. Thus the internal and external layers are separated and weaken the whole structure of the building. As many of the historical monuments are situated on the sea shore, they come in touch of strong sea wind with huge volume of humidity. This is a major problem to save these monuments. Besides, the transfer of bacteria, micro fauna, fungi, and other organism along with eroded wind-blown soil are accumulated in the walls and the roves of the monuments and at the time of its expansion, they cause damages closer to the destruction. In our country, the Sun temple of Konarak, the temples on shore of Bay of Bengal are largely affected by such problems. In case of Konarak, urban growth, deforestation due to cyclone and human beings, saline breeze and sand blasting, pollution caused by vehicular movement, micro-biological growths are large the factors causing damages to the structure of the temple.¹⁰ Air pollution along with soil salinity leads to the formation of chemical reaction that damages natural building material. Salt weathering due to marine environment is the essential weathering process that causes degradation of the very porous limestone and sandstone. This can be observed in many historical monuments in coastal regions of India. Absence of perfect sewage systems also cause harm to the ground water table and pollution which adversely affect the structures of the monuments.

Conclusion

Different measures regarding preservation of such monuments in order to maintain sustainability of present development and to save the scope of reconstruction of history, some measures to be taken both at government and NGO level. To save the

monuments or the traditional settlements from either environmental pollution caused by either natural calamities or reckless developmental process, a master plan should be prepared and implemented properly. It may include relocation of shops removed from the temple area, proper parking facilities, development of garden around the monument and improvement of main approach road towards the monument. To preserve the historical values of the property, necessary legislative acts should be enforced. To prevent the marine wind fully loaded with salinity and sand blasting, especially in the coastal regions, green belt should be developed and to check illegal felling of trees. To launch new programme for urban or industrial development, it is necessary to consider their negative impact on cultural and historical monuments. Existing geological condition surrounding the monuments should be investigated. Therefore a fresh infrastructure should be developed for an extensive research to understand the actual state of the monuments so that the cultural and historical monuments can serve as sources of knowing the little facts of history which can act as the sub-structure to understand the whole historical process.

On the other hand, to save the historical remains both at micro and macro level government should be more careful to generate consciousness among the people so that the scope of historical research may be alive in future. Since a nation cannot achieve her richness without having her cultural past, we shall be careful to preserve our historical monuments and the cultural past associated. It not only bears prestigious values but also contributes to material development that is obviously necessary in the age of global consumerism creating the scope of employability.

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 - ⁸ Village Tourism in Sikkim, p. 3.
 - ⁹ Village Tourism in Sikkim, p. 5.
 - ¹⁰ http://portal.unesco.org/geography/es/files/10639/12282842315Mr_Nair.pdf/Mr%2BNair.pdf, p. 38.