

Environmental History in India: A Review of Historiography

**SUMMARY
OF
DISSERTATION**

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SUMMARY

Environmental issues acquired significant popularity and priority in the contemporary times. Particularly the impact of global warming on fragile eco-systems at one level and livelihoods of vulnerable people at another level received wider attention from public and academic circles. It is this context that had popularised discourse related to various aspects of the phenomenon of environment and issues interconnected with it. This study is an attempt to capture the trajectory of the evolution of environmental history and various factors that had influenced in India. The main objective of this study is to analyse and document a brief narrative on the historiography of the environmental history of India. This attempt is significant in the context of fascinating historical literature emerged on the ecological dimension to study Indian history in the last four decades. This historical knowledge has significantly been contributing for better inputs to environmental policies and sensitisation of public over issues pertaining to environmental conservation. Hence a review on evolutionary trajectory of environmental history is useful to track the dynamics of the environmental history of India.

This study attempts to explore a brief review of various approaches that are employed by historians for representing the environmental history of India in general and environmental history of modern India in particular. An attempt has also been made to capture the historiographical trends that have emerged in the last four decades in India. This study is more interested in exploring the didactical relationship between the past and present with particular reference to the environmental history of India. This academic endeavor is useful for us to explore the linkages between the present and construction of the past for the needs of the present.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Environmental crisis in general and ecologic crisis induced by the climate change in particular emerged as pressing global issues to be handled immediately for survival of human civilisation. Being a topical country, India is more vulnerable to climate which expected to unleash devastating change which may impact heavily on livelihoods of rural population who still dependent upon resources of nature critically for survival. The global climate change mainly a result of the manmade disaster at one level and its severe implications at another level made handling environmental issues a compulsion for civil society and academia to devise strategies for conservation of environmental aspects. Environmental history is a response of historians to reflect upon the historical dimension of human interaction with natural resources to locate the roots of the ecological crisis and obviously come up with more plausible solutions to the ecological crisis. It is this context that resulted in the emergence of environmental history mainly in the United States of America, several countries in Europe and in India as well.

Interestingly, writing ecological history of Indian subcontinent begun from 1980s onwards. Gradually, vibrant and passionate literature on ecological dimension to Indian history emerged as one of the strong historical traditions in India. Particularly the British colonial rule attracted the attention of historians for it had unleashed sweeping changes in terms of exploitation of natural resources in an unprecedented way. The ecological history of modern India thus aimed at exploring the colonial impact on ecological systems of India. In the last four decades, exciting researches have been carried out by historians to analyse ecological implications of British colonial rule and its legacies in independent India. In this context, a survey of historiography on the pattern of the environmental history of India is useful to track the direction of research trends that is going on in the field of the environmental history of India.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study aims at documentation of a brief survey on different historiographical traditions that have evolved and being practiced for historical documentation on the role of the British in changing the ecological systems of India and various dynamics of that process itself. In short, this study deals with the historiography of the environmental history of India.

The fact, however, is that it is not an easy task to document historiography of the environmental history of India. It is on account of the fact that the literature emerged on the environmental history of India is not only vast but also extremely complicated. Several new conceptual and theoretical approaches are being used to capture the ecological dimension of British colonial rule. On account of these complexity limitations of this study needed to be spelled very clearly. Firstly, this study does not claim that it would offer a compressive review of the historiography of the environmental history of India, rather it takes certain popular samples in the form of books and articles to arrange the trend of each approach. On account of its nature it does not depend upon primary sources, rather uses the published sources to analyze the conceptual and methodological content of each approach. Another limitation is that on account of the vastness of topic we do not offer elaborate criticism of each approach, rather confined to brief note on limitations of each approach that we have dwelt. Another significant limitation of this study is that the studies reviewed for historiography of environmental history of India mainly confines to forest histories of British India. In short, this study is an attempt to propose a brief survey of literature that had emerged in the last four years on the environmental history of India.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

While narrating historiographical trends on the environmental history of India this study revolves around the following objectives:

- 1). To explore and document the context that inspired and directed the process of emergence of environmental writings in India.
- 2). To analyze the impact of international factors that stimulated the writings on the environmental history of India.
- 3). To analyze the ideological factors that have conditioned the analytical pattern of historiographical approaches in the field of the environmental history of India.
- 4). To trace the roots of environmental history in Indian historiography.
- 5). To document the contemporary ecological crisis and their impact on history writing.
- 6). To analyze the engagement of environmental historians in understanding the impact of ecology in human society.
- 7). To narrate the impact of the conceptual framework of each approach in its model of writings the environmental history of India.
- 8). To propose brief limitations of various historiographical approaches that are used for writings the environmental history of India.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

This study intends to document the history of historiography of the environmental history of India inspired by the following hypothesis:

1. Environmental historians engaged in exploring the relationship between nature and human beings in the past in India.
2. Environmental history emerged as a creative discourse which uses the past to explore ecological roots of human action and thereby attempting to construct harmonious future for human and nature relationship in the Indian context.
3. Environmental history writings are significantly inspired by contemporary environmental concerns and issues.
4. In the last four decades, environmental history emerged as one of the significant public voices which popularized the need for immediate action for addressing the problem caused by human action to ecologically important resources.
5. Environmental history writings popularized by the eco-sensitive Indian value system and eco-destructive British colonial rule.
6. Environmental history has contributed to the debate on climate change by the way of providing policy histories of ecologically sensitive resources such as water, forests, agriculture, etc.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The methodology adopted in this study would be characterized as a critical, analytical, descriptive and interpretative approach to document the history of environmental history in India. The study efforts to study and document a review of historiographical trends of environmental history in India. Keeping in view of the aims and objectives of the study, particular attention has been paid to the transformative trajectory of ideas and approaches to

explore, examine and analyze the historiographical trends that influenced the nature of environmental history in India. The analytical and evaluative task has been undertaken by exploring and analyzing the important literature that has emerged in the last four decades in India.

This study primarily concerns with documentation of trends of historiography on the environmental history of modern India. For this task to perform, this study consulted a wide range of published sources consisting of books and paper published in journals. The main task of this exercise is to capture the analytical, methodological and conceptual narratives of historians which reflect their ideological cohesion. In order to explore this trend, the conceptual framework of discourse analysis method which claims that knowledge is produced in the form of discourses and its authenticity is determined by the position of power in society. In order to analyze the historiography of the environmental history of India, this study attempts to capture multiple discourses that are advanced by historians in order to represent the historical and ecological dimension of British colonial rule in India.

CHAPTERISATION OF THE STUDY

In order to narrate the narrative of the historiography of the environmental history of India, this study has been organized into the following chapters:

This first chapter of this study entitled introduction deals with the introductory aspects of the study. A systematic and modest narration has been an attempt on the context of the study, objectives of the study, hypothesis, review of the literature and Chapterisation of the study. The main objective of this chapter is to explore the thematic illustration of the study and various aspects to it.

The second chapter of this study entitled the emergence of environmental history as a discipline of history deals with three important factors which explicitly or implicitly influenced environmental history writing pattern. Firstly, the contemporary environmental protection movement world over and India, secondly, intellectual inspiration to writing environmental history and finally a brief review on environmental history writing trends world over and their impact on environmental history writings in India.

The third chapter of this study entitled historiographical approaches on the environmental history of India: a review narrates important historiographical approaches that are practiced to represent the history of British colonial rule and its impact on Indian ecology and the population critically dependent upon ecologically important resources. The main objective of this chapter is to document the major dynamics of historiography on environmental history writings in India.

The chapter fourth highlights the entire study in the form of a summary followed by a rational conclusion and the main findings of my study indicating scopes for further research in this area. The conclusion is very brief reflects the major and most important findings of the environmental history written by eminent historians with their methodology and approaches. It is expected, the outcome of the study will serve the self-same purpose for which it has been undertaken.