Banausia and Endo-History: European Concepts of Indian Historical Consciousness

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Abstract

This paper was written as a contribution to the debate about the place of history and history writing in South Asia. It was written in order to offer a solution to the question of how history was conceived in South Asia and why western scholars did not recognize South Asian historical thinking as “history”. The paper introduces the concept of “endohistory” as a parallel concept to “endogamy” and argues that local and kin-based structures of historical narration are the typical pre-modern way of narrating the past. These narratives were integrated into national discourses in Europe at the time of the formation of modern states. As a result, Academic Historiography did not recognize other forms of narration as “history” at all. In contrast to this, there was no parallel growth of national identity and national historical narratives in South Asia before the 20th century. While politics became increasingly complex from 1000 AD, and with the Mughal empire also “modern”, historical narratives remained kin-based and localized. Instead, the essence of these narrations was transcended into literature.

Translation of abstract (English)

The present paper was written as a contribution to the debate about the place of history and history writing in South Asia. It was written in order to offer a solution to the question of how history was conceived in South Asia and why western scholars did not recognize South Asian historical thinking as “history”. The paper introduces the concept of “endohistory” as a parallel concept to “endogamy” and argues that local and kin-based structures of historical narration are the typical pre-modern way of narrating the past. These narratives were integrated into national discourses in Europe at the time of the formation of modern states. As a result, Academic Historiography did not recognize other forms of narration as “history” at all. In contrast to this, there was no parallel growth of national identity and national historical narratives in South Asia before the 20th century. While politics became increasingly complex from 1000 AD, and with the Mughal empire also “modern”, historical narratives remained kin-based and localized. Instead, the essence of these narrations was transcended into literature.

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Modern History of India. During the late 16th and the 17th Centuries, the European trading companies in India competed with each other ferociously. By the last quarter of the 18th Century the English had outdone all others and established themselves as the dominant power in India. The British administered India for a period of about two centuries and brought about revolutionary changes in the social, political and the economic life of the country. Once the British set their foot solidly on Indian soil, they began the commercial exploitation of the natural resources of India. The feeling of nationalism had started growing in the minds of Indians as early as the middle of the nineteenth century but it grew more with the formation of the Indian national Congress in 1885. History of Consciousness is the name of a department in the Humanities Division of the University of California, Santa Cruz with a 40-year history of interdisciplinary research and student training in "established and emergent disciplines and fields" in the humanities, arts, and social sciences based on a diverse array of theoretical approaches. The program has a history of well-known affiliated faculty and of well-known program graduates.