



**HIGHLIGHTING THE WORKS OF A LESS KNOWN
HISTORIAN TO HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ANCIENT INDIA
IN THE 20TH CENTURY**

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Abstract:

Research is described as careful search or enquiry, endeavor to discover new ideas by scientific study-a course of critical investigation. It means to observe the phenomena again and again from different dimensions, which is oriented towards the discovery of relationships that exists among the phenomena of the world where we live. Research attempts to determine, describe and identify "what is", "why it is" and "how" on scientific way. Historians used deliberation and the critical consciousness to arrive at judgments and narrations of things that happened in the past, going beyond the limits of what is within his direct knowledge or the knowledge of people around him, and in doing so historian examine and evaluate various kinds of evidence. As history embraces past, present and future time past and time present are both perhaps present in time future. Any human society in historical process is not fully known on the evidence alone what has actually happened and it calls for a perceptions of what is yet too happened and remains unknown from what is already known. The ideological elements have their important role in a historical account to commingle all those dimensions. In this paper, a modest attempt has been made to highlight the little contribution G.P. Singh has made to the historiography of ancient India.

Key Words: Historiography, Historical Works & Methods

Introduction:

"The Indian Historian was once regarded primarily as an Orientalist or an Indologist, in the days when the studies of languages and cultures of Asia were fragrant with exotica. In the contemporary world, the history of early societies is being approached from many perspectives rather than being limited to the periods set to have created classical cultures.Changes in the political pattern is inextricably entwined with changes in the economic structure and in social relationships. If a religious movement finds a large following, then its attraction must have some relevance to the kind of people who support it. A new language and a new literature can only emerge if they fulfill a need for the society in which they are rooted. It is not enough for the historians to present the ideas of those who attempted to create the contours of the history of India. It is essential to attempt to know how these ideas arose and the extent of their acceptability within Indian society. History is concerned with change and historical change, and, although it may not be determined, it is also not arbitrary or purposeless. The formation of varied societies in a region surfaces through historical analysis, and in this surfacing the historian points out the players and the context. Theories of expansion assist in understanding the context and such theories differ. For some power relations may be fundamental; for others it may be dialectic of who controls resources and labour and who labours, for still others it may be the relationship between socio-economic structures and the ideologies that they spawn, or the invasion of this. For a few historians it can also be the inter locking of all these" (Romila Thappar: 2003:29-35).

Certain techniques and methods have been developed in the reconstruction of History. Body of knowledge is derived partly from tradition and partly from observation and hearsay to begin with. With the passage of time historians-and these people now regarded as forerunner of historiography-began to consciously apply method to have their facts right by getting them the sources which are authentic by cross examining and by cross-checking with other sources. In rare instances, the best among them, also tried to overcome bias in favor of the community or country the historian belonged to. In essentials, the search for authenticity, the effort to cross-checking and cross-evaluation of source materials, the objective of overcoming bias remain part of historians' agenda at present. History is a subject which makes continuous effort to gather the knowledge what happened in the past and historiography is about how such efforts were made in past by man who composed history by word of mouth or a written form - historiography is the history of history writing.

Contribution:

Dr. Girish Prasad Singh popularly known as G. P. Singh, Professor Emeritus, is one of the eminent historians of India. He is also a Living Legend. He has given immense contributions in the field of Ancient Indian History and the Ideas of History itself. G.P. Singh was born on June 01, 1942, at village Raghapur, Dist. Samastipur, Bihar. During 1980-2000, G.P. Singh wrote several books and research papers on Ancient Indian Tribes, Society, Economy, Polity, Religion and Culture, Towns and Cities (which form the part of urban History) and historiography, etc and thereby made some contributions to the development of historical writing on ancient Indian history and culture in latter half of the last century.

In one of his work, *The Kiratas in Ancient India: A Historical Study Of Their Life, Culture And Civilization*, Delhi, 1990 (G.P. Singh: 1990), he has exhaustively dealt with the origins, antiquity, ethnology, identification and expansion. He has proved for the first time that the Kiratas, one of the popular ancient Indian tribes were widely diffused having settlements in the eastern, north-eastern, northern, north-western and southern parts of India. He has brought to light the fact that all the Kiratas did not belong to the Mongoloid stock as held by some anthropologist, historians and philologists but only some of them are Mongoloid who have been peopled since the time immemorial. The Kiratas in the Gangetic valleys and plains are documented and recorded in the history as an indigenous origin. He has also thrown a good deal of light on their social, economic, political and religious and cultural life, kingdoms and principalities and contributions to Indian culture and civilization. He has rebuilt the history of their dynastic rule in Nepal from the epic age down to the seventh century which constitutes the distinguishing hallmark of the work. His work is largely based on original sources including Sanskrit, Buddhist and Jains works, epigraphic records and the Greek and Roman account. He took almost a decade to complete this work. In the foreword to this book, Prof. R.S. Sharma, who is internationally known as a historian of ancient India and authority on ancient Indian history, observed as: "G.P. Singh has tried to re-construct their (Kirata's) history from the beginning to medieval times and assessed their contribution to the making of the history and culture of India. I hope that this book will provide a wealth of data to scholars and prepare the ground for further studies of this type" (G.P.Singh:1990).

In his *Early Indian Historical Tradition and Archaeology*, Delhi, 1994 (G.P.Singh:1994), he has provided the detailed historical accounts of the kingdoms and dynasties of the pre and post- Bharat War period, the Pradyota Dynasty (c.513-411 BC) of Avanti, Magadhan Dynasties of the pre-Maurya period (from Bimbisara to the end of the Nanda Dynasty c. 543-321 BC), the Maurya and post-Maurya Dynasties down to the Satavahanas (c. 321 BC – 225 AD), the Naga Dynasties (from the second century BC to the fourth century AD), the Vakatakas and the Guptas from the third to the sixth century AD), kingdoms and Dynasties of the post-Harsa period (c. 650- 1200 AD) and Minor Kingdoms and Dynasties.

The dynastic genealogies and chronology given in this book enhances its value. One of the characteristic features of this work is that the authenticity of the existing 106 (one hundred and six) dates of the so called Mahabharata War has been critically examined by the author. He has rejected the traditional date 3138 or 3102 BC and suggested three probable dates = 1450 BC, 1150 BC, and 850 BC. In his review of this book in *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Holm (Germany), Vol., 24, Nos., 1 and 2, 1996, Edgar C. Polome, a German Scholar, said: "..... on the whole his (G.P. Singh's) book is very enlightening and clarifies many a problem of early Indic historical chronology. His final tables and comments are practically useful, and his work will, no doubt, retain the careful attention of all historians of the South-Asia Subcontinent"(G.P.Singh:1996).

In his *Ancient Indian Political Thought*, Delhi, 1993(G.P.Singh:1993), G.P. Singh has dwelt at length upon the emergence of the state, the evolution of the institution of kingship and inter-state relations in ancient India. This work constitutes an addition to the historiographical works on ancient Indian polity produced by others historians in the 20th century.

"Pre-Persian Foreign Expeditions of North-Western India"(G.P.Singh:1987), written by him in 1987, "Ancient Indian Society and Economy in the Jain and Buddhist Traditions"(G.P.Singh:1991) and "Social and Economic Formations in the latter half of the First millennium BC"(G.P.Singh:1992) in 1991-92, "India From Ariana to the Ganga Valley" (on the original homeland and expansion of the Aryans) and "The Origin, Antiquity and Identification of the Cinas" published in the *Journal of the Bharatiya Itihas Adhyayan Sansthan*, Allahabad (Vol. II, 2, 1992: V, 1 and 2, 1995) respectively, "Ancient Indian Religious system in the times of Manu and Patanjali" published in the *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Poona, LXXV, 1994, and "Assam in the Gupta Age c. AD 335-594: A Reappraisal in Ancient Indian historical perspective"(G.P.Singh:1998) written in 1998 – all later appeared in his *Facets of Ancient Indian History and Culture New Perception*, Delhi, 2003(G.P.Singh:2003)

He has also contributed to the historical writings on Ancient Indian Trade and Commerce. His "Trade and Commerce in Ancient India in the light of Jain and Buddhist Traditions bearing on its Economic and Cultural context with the Asian countries" appeared in proceeding volume of 14th Conference of International Association of Historians of Asia, Bangkok, 1996.

He has for the first time highlighted "The Role of the Brahmanas in Anti-Alexander Movement in North –West India c. 326-325 BC"(G.P.Singh:1995) this has been published in *Studies in History and Culture*, Department of History, Brahmampur University, Vol. 3. No.1, 1995.

"The Concept of National Integration in Ancient India"(G.P.Singh:1993), by him has been published in *Dimensions of National Integration: The Experiences and Lessons of Indian History* (ed. by N.R. Ray), Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1993.

He has also made some contribution to the writings on class and caste in Ancient India. One of his very important papers in this regard "The Concepts of Varna (class) and Jati (caste) in the Jain and Buddhist Traditions"(G.P.Singh:1997) has appeared in the *Journal of the Bharatiya Itihas Adhyayan Sansthan*, Allahabad, Vol. II Nos. 1 and 2, 1997.

His writings on the Early History of North Western India based on the accounts of the Greek and Assyrian Travelers of the first century AD (G.P.Singh:1998) written in 1998 appeared in two reputed historical Journals - *Journal of Indian History* (Trivendrum, Platinum Jubilee Volume) and *Journal of the Asiatic of Bombay* (Vol. 77-78, 2003).

Conclusion:

In addition to the above works, Prof. G. P. Singh has published some others books and papers relating to Ancient Indian History and Culture. The greatness of Dr. G. P. Singh as a historian is so imprinted in all his works that the stresses and strains of times and circumstances will never be able to obliterate his name from heart of the academia in the soil of India. The analysis of the nature of the sources used by G. P. Singh revealed that he has written history of ancient India like the other prominent historians of the 20th and 21st century who have adopted modern scientific methods inviting history comforting to standard methodology. Prof. Singh used both conventional and non-conventional methods in writing history. He interprets myths and legends as well as rites, rituals, beliefs and practices for reconstructing history from below. To G. P. Singh history was essentially history of common people and did not confine to the history of great man or kings or ruling class. His treatment of facts has always critical, analytical and empirical. Dr. Singh desires to protect and preserve the relics of ancient past. He has great command of language and his technique of writing history is exceptionally pleasurable, systematic, attractive and significant. Indeed, G. P. Singh has been a torch-bearer of hundreds of historians and research scholars on Ancient Indian History in 20th.

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