MAJOR TRENDS IN HISTORICAL THOUGHT AND WRITING
MODULE-1
TOPIC: CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY

PREPARED BY
PRIYANKA.E.K
DEPT OF HISTORY
LITTLE FLOWER COLLEGE
GURUVAYOOR
Circumstances favorable for the growth of Chinese historiography

- Most historically minded people
- Called as ‘Paradise of Historians’
- 1. from early times recording of past events considered as very important
  - archives of documents such as registers, family trees, records of contracts, & oracles
  - princely houses kept officials to draw up treaties, record edicts, draft documents etc.
  - Archivist astrologer act as Secretary to Emperor
2. Growth of rationalist movement - flowering of culture which bought philosophical thought to a climax – helped the growth of history as a subject

- For Chinese philosophy meant a kind of wisdom that is necessary for conduct of life, particularly for govt.

- From 7th C onwards a separate department for History emerged & it became important subject in civil service examination

- History made as most popular & respectable form of literature in China
CONFUCIUS:
- 6th C B.C
- stressed the importance of history in promoting reverence for the past & respect for the examples set up by ancestors
- 3 curriculum for his pupil - history, poetry, rules of propriety (behavior that is accepted as socially or morally correct and proper)
- *Five Ching* or Canonical Books – 2 of these books – 4th & 5th are historical works
- Fourth – *Ch’un Ch’ieu or Spring and Autumn Annals* - brief chronicle of the reigns of 12 Dukes of his own province Lu from 722-484 BC - also a guide to moral conduct

- Fifth - *Shu-Ching or Book of History or Book of Documents* – collection of royal speeches, edicts, memorials, feudal documents etc.

  - Cannot be considered as a historian as he added to his record imaginary speeches & stories to promote morals & wisdom

  - But contributed for the growth of history as a discipline
SUMA CHIEN:
- Father of oriental history
- son of court historian & astrologer of Han Emperor Wu
- like his father he also entered in to royal service
- asked to complete the task of writing *Shih Chi* (Historical Record) started by his father

- *Shih Chi* – greatest work – 130 chapters – cover the history of China for a period of 3000 years
- Early part – more mythical in nature
- But from the middle of 3rd C BC – it become more detailed & precise particularly of Han dynasty
FEATURES OF HIS WRITINGS:
- Unlike his predecessors he wrote history of world
- draws upon more varied collection of source materials than his predecessors
- look beyond boundaries of court
- depart from tradition of chronological arrangement-
  divided his book into 5 sections
  - Basic annals of Emperors
  - Chronological tables
  - Eight chapters/ treatises on rites, music, astrology etc
  - Annals of Feudal nobles
  - Biographies of Eminent Men
• No serious attempt to explain & interpret
• Saw history as the product of man’s will & did not seek to comprehend it
• Events are presented as informed by the documents or reported by eyewitnesses
• It has moral & didactical purpose
• Grand historian of China
• With him Chinese historiography came to exert a profound influence on Japanese, Korean & Vietnamese history writing.
PAN KU:
- 1st C. AD
- followed Suma Ch’iens pattern of organization
- HISTORY OF THE FORMER HAN DYNASTY
- Set up a new pattern of writing
- started a practice for each dynasty to compile historical material for his successors
- DIARIES OF ACTIVITY AND REPOSE – utterances of the emperor & the business that he transacted day to day
- VERITABLE RECORD – A survey of an Emperors reign, when the Emperor died
- this practice continued for several years
• From Tang rulers – 7th C. CE – national history
• New office for compilation of history started-committee of scholars were formed
• scholars made use of archival sources, record of existing Govt., diaries etc.
• Monographs & treaties on economy, astronomy, calendar making etc.
• Biographies of important personalities
- Private historians
- YANG HSIU - 11th c CE – official as well as non-official historian - NEW HISTORY OF TANG - NEW HISTORY OF THE FIVE DYNASTIES
- SUMA KUANG – HISTORY AS A MIRROR - a guide for future emperors & statesmen
- YUAN SHU – 12th c - EVENTS IN HISTORY AS A MIRROR - arranged events in accordance with events, instead of chronological order
- CHENG CHIA - GENERAL RECORD - history of music, literature & humanities
- MA TUAN – 14th c – A STUDY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE – about land tax, money & exchange, population, commerce, education, criminal justice
Assessment of Chinese Historiography

- No nation produced such voluminous, continuous, varied & accurate record of past – imperial history, local & dynastic histories, gazetteers, chronicles
- European historians did not consider Chinese history as proper history
- Defects – moral purpose of historical writings, deviate from objectivity
  - did not attempt for causal explanation – not interpret data