

Oral History: Scope and Significance

ABSTRACT

The concept of oral history is not a new one. It is as old as history itself. Even when the human beings did not know the alphabets, the elders of the family used to narrate the achievements of their ancestors to the younger ones. In this way, the historical events and memories were passed on from one generation to the next. We find a number of oral traditions in the historical works of Herodotus and Thucydides, the Greek historians of fifth century B.C. Several Greek and Roman historians who came after Thucydides used written as well as oral traditions for historiography. In medieval Europe, historians had a vast collection of oral traditions. There were a number of story-tellers who had a lot of knowledge about the royal family and important affairs of the state. According to Henige, there were bards and poets who can be considered to be traditional historians. These people used to narrate the events of the past as a source of livelihood, and to gain prestige within their own society. It can be said that historians use evidence to understand the experience of people in the past while oral history can be a valuable source of evidence for understanding the experiences of individuals or groups in a certain historical context.

Key Words: Oral, historiography, historians, people, masses, subaltern, folk-lore, folk songs.

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