

# Problem and Prospects of Nepali Historiography

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## Abstracts

*The art of writing history, developed from the 5th century BC with an account of the personal events and epics of kings, emperors, war events. Now the historian has begun the scientific approach on history writing based on the collection, analysis and refinement of facts by scientific method. Reflection of Political change around the world has been seen in history writing. After the democratization of the world it should be more transparent and people oriented. In opposite to democratic value (historiography should be more transparent, scientifically credible, people based and reliable), spontaneity have been introduced in historiography. Historiography could not remain untouched by the effects of change around the world and Nepali historiography didn't become an exception in this context. It is found that the work of writing the history of Nepal started from foreign scholars. Since the military officers and foreign diplomats who came to Nepal after the Sugauli Treaty (1816 A.D.) were the beginners of writing the history of Nepal. Some of the contexts of the history written by those foreigners seem to be more controversial and subjective than factual. The English and European historians who contributed to the writing of the history of Nepal, they didn't understand the essence of scientific historiography. Also, their attitude towards Nepal and Nepalis was not respectable. The history written by such officials and the context of rewritten history giving details of the same history has not become credible in today's world of science. More recently, social issues such as ethnicity, regionalism has been distorted and misinterpreted and social hatred has been spread through history. History written today with subjectivity, passed on to future generations, it will be against the spirit and essence of scientific historiography. This article is based on qualitative research and seeks to discuss the challenges faced by historian on contemporary Nepali historiography. In-depth interview and library research approaches are being employed to collect the data. This is a descriptive study limited to historical research. This article also emphasizes the Nepali historian to accept the challenge seen in writing Nepali history and pass on the truth, facts and scientific history to the future generation. Many Nepali scholars have contributed in Nepali historiography but they are not free from the traditional perspective thus it is the time to write Subaltern history to explore the real Nepali historiography to the writing of factual Nepali history.*

**Keyword-** *History writing- research- challenges of history- European scholars- Peoples history- controversy.*

## Introduction

The term historiography, which originated in Greece in the fifth century BC, has evolved over time. Until the nineteenth century, historians' main concern was with facts and philosophy had not been accepted as part of history. Later, philosophy was also accepted as a part of history and philosophical influence in historiography was also evaluated. In the

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twentieth century, the Italian historian Cronje unveiled a new perspective (Mishra, 2003). History "basically evaluates past events in the context of modern problems. The main task of the historian is to evaluate the facts, not to accumulate facts or details of events or the descriptions (Ghimire, 2022). The Greek philosopher Herodotus linked it to discovery and research, but his definition has become widespread in the twenty-first century, and attitudes have changed. Traditional historiography was influenced by events in Europe such as the Renaissance and the Reformation (Karki, 2022). Scholars, including Machiavelli, were the first to attempt to associate history with politics. The eighteenth century saw a revolutionary change in the field of historiography (Mishra, 2003). Criticism has taken its place in historiography instead of interpretation. The nineteenth century was the age of radiance. Historians such as Hegel, Newer, Ranke, and Marx replaced traditional approach with a new idealist philosophy in historiography. The influence of class theory and materialist philosophy added a new dimension to historiography (Kshetry, 2022). The tradition of analyzing each and every event from a vantage point and materialist point of view began. The German scholar Max Weber linked history with sociology, and consequently history became sociology in Germany. In the twentieth century, the form of historiography became scientific (Ghimire, 2022). The famous historian such as Toynbee, J. H. Robinson, Collingwood, and Spengler pioneered scientific historiography. Thus began the art of historiography in the genre of historiography based on three major perspectives, the idealist approach, the materialist approach, and the naturalist approach ( Karki, 2022 ).

The practice of preserving the history of Nepal through genealogy, mythology, archives, etc. has been practiced since ancient times, the work of writing history as a genre can be traced back to the early nineteenth century( Mishra, 2003). After the establishment of the Company Government in India, the process of writing the history of Nepal was started on the basis of the material collected by the British military officer for the purpose of getting information from the Government of Nepal( Kshetry,2022). The history written by them was neither scholarly nor factual base. They used the information and materials obtained through the people they met during the collection of information as a source for writing history. As a result, Nepal's history has been found full of controversies.

Many of the researchers sought to discuss the Nepali historiography but they did not cover all facets of Nepalese history writing history. Before proceeding to the topic under investigation, it is very much rational to review already published literature dealing with different aspects of Nepali historiography. A thorough review of literature certainly helps to identify research problems, present situation and research gap on the area of research. No significant work has been published on Nepali historiography with an exception of Tirtha Mishra, Dil Bahadur Kshetry, Ramesh Shrestha, Rajesh Gautam, Bharat Jangam on such a vague topic. All these published references are reviewed before proceeding to the research. The first and foremost place in the study and survey of Nepali historiography is recurred by Prof Tirtha Mishra. He has extensively inaugurated the issue of writing history. Prof. Dil Bahadur Kshetry has addressed the chronology of Nepali history. Likewise, Prof. Rajesh Gautam, Prof. Ramesh Shrestha have done pioneer work on the issue but they didn't highlighted the

drawback of Nepali historiography as well as criticism on history writing process. Bharat Jangam was critical on the issue of Nepali historical events and facts interpretations but he also didn't cover the holistic approach of Nepali historiography. He has raised some issue relating to controversies but his work didn't answer the raised research problem. The academicians and other researchers who had contributed in Nepali history writing process fail to address the raised research issue of this article. They are very critical to the issue but they didn't cover the overall aspect of Nepali historiography. This research is focusing on specific topics that are not being addressed by the previous studies. The study attempts to address the following question:

- (A) To evaluate the chronology of Nepali history writing phenomenon.
- (B) To discuss the challenges of Nepali historiography.

## **Method and Methodology**

This article is based upon a qualitative analysis. Explanatory, descriptive, analytical as well as informative method has been used in this research. Basic source of information for this research is primary as well as secondary information. Informal interview with open-ended questionnaire was conducted to collect the first hand information on the topic. For more general discussions has been organized in the entire above mentioned topic. Discussions have been organized with historians, scholars and University Professors. Mainly discussion method was done to collect the data. Both formal and informal discussion was held with the concern stake holders. This research consists of present context data but some historical references are cited in the appropriate places. For secondary information basically library research method is used. Relevant books, journal articles, online websites and related publications have been used properly. All the information collected has been classified, summarized, analyzed and some reflection has been made for this research. In this article attempts have been made to cover the process of writing the Nepali history of the twenty-first century since 1811. This article seeks to present the conflicting aspects of history, especially those written by English and European scholars and chronology of Nepali historiography.

This study is limited to historical study of Nepali historiography. This study doesn't cover the social, political, legal, economic and other aspects of Nepali history writing process.

## **Discussion**

### **History of Nepali history**

Although Nepal is an ancient country from the historical point of view, the tradition of writing history in Nepal was found to have started only in the 19th century AD. Before the 19th century, it was not a matter of writing history in Nepal but of collecting history (Mishra, 2003.). The history of Nepal was collected in various archives, handwritten texts, Thyasafu, footprints of idols ( Shrestha, 2019). The same collected history was published in the form of a book by a British military officer who came to Nepal in the first half of the 19th century to collect information. The British military officers who wrote the history of

Nepal were neither historians nor scholars, nor did they use the scientific method of writing history in their writings (Shrestha, 2019). Therefore, the authenticity of these texts, the events / phenomena they raised has been proved by the new generation historians to be unproven, mythical history by verifying it through scientific method. The British have a majority in writing the history of Nepal (Mishra, 2003). The first book was written by William Kirkpatrick in 1811. "An Account of the Kingdom of Nepul" was the first and foremost contribution in Nepali historiography. After him in 1819, Hamilton published another book, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (Mishra, 2003). Although Hamilton's book is based on the analysis of factual sources compared to Kirkpatrick. It has not been found fair without controversy (Ghimire, 2022). Since then, many British diplomats have been contributing to the writing of Nepal's history. Daniel Wright in 1872, wrote "Sketches of Deportation of the Country of Nepal to Europeans. In 1877, he published two books entitled 'History of Nepal with an Introductory Sketch of the Country and People of Nepal'. Similarly, in 1878, Oldfield's book 'Sketches from Nepal' was published. In 1880, Hudson published treaties entitled "Miscellaneous Essays Relating to Indian Subjects" (Joshi, 2001). It was only after 1880 that historians other than the British and European appeared on the scene of writing the history of Nepal. In which Bhagwan Lal Indraji (India), Har Prasad Shastri (India), K.P. Jaiswal (India), Silva levy (France), Luciano Petek (Italy) etc. For the first time, Silva levy added a new dimension to Nepali historiography using Chinese sources (Kshetry, 2022). It was only after the 1900s that Nepali historians began to write about the history of Nepal. Among them Padya Jung Rana, Ambika Prasad Upadhyay, Ramji Prasad Upadhyay, Dilliraman Regmi, Balachandra Sharma, Baburam Acharya, Dhanvajra Bajracharya, Pdt. Nayaraj Pant, Gyanmani Nepal, Yogi Narharinath, Mahesh Raj Pant, Dinesh Raj Pant, Itihas Sansodhan Mandal, Chitaranjan Nepali, Yogi Narahari Nath etc. are prominent. Ambika Prasad Upadhyaya published the history of Nepal for the first time in Nepali language. Even after that, the work of writing the history of Nepal by various local and foreign historians is still going on till today (Jagannam, 2020).

## **Major Challenges faced by the historians**

### **Challenge on the source**

The history of Nepal, written by foreign scholars, especially British and European historians, has come under controversy in today's context. Most of the local and foreign historians who have contributed in the field of historiography of Nepal have been analyzing the history of Nepal using the source materials based on the English and European historians such as Kirkpatrick, Hudson, Oldfield, Wright and others (Jagannam, 2020).

Nepali historian who borrowed fact and events from European and English historians they are neither friendly to Nepal nor they have a respect to Nepali rulers because after Sugauli treaty of 1816 they have forcefully entered Nepal. They came to collect the information about military strength, resources and strategic location of Nepal. They are not interested in Nepali history. That's why their interpretation became controversial. Other major challenge on their writing was the source of sources. They never verified the information they have collected. They never interpreted their collection scholarly. Their books are not more than the collection

of information (Ghimire, 2022).

Access of source is another challenge to the western author faced during their writing. During their stay they were treated as culprit and weren't allowed to interact and access the original and authentic sources. Their collection became superficial and controversial (Joshi, 2001.).

### **Challenge on the interpretations**

An attempt has been made to analyze the challenges in Nepali historiography with the help of following examples:-

In 1928, English historian Percival Landon's book 'Nepal' was published. The work was prepared on the request of P.M. Chandra Shamsher. He wrote his book on the basis of Nepali sources provided by Chandra Samsher. He also collected documents from the British archives and field observation has been done by the author himself to complete the book. Landon has managed to bring important information and facts to the public but he has praised Chandra Shamsher (Mishra, 2003) which was the error of his writing. This book, written on the basis of previously published texts, contains historical errors (Mishra, 2003)

In 1857, there was a revolt in India to drive the British out of India. This historical revolt is considered by British historians as a military revolt or Sepoy Mutiny, while Indian historians have termed it as India's first freedom struggle (Gautam, 2007). Citing the same English historians, Nepali historians also cited the incident as Sepoy Mutiny without referencing Indian authors. Citing the English historians rather than scientific and logical analysis, the incident has become a controversial topic in history. Till date it is considered as Sepoy Mutiny in Nepali history.

In 1956, Chitranjan Nepali made a comprehensive assessment of Bhimsen Thapa on the basis of Nepali sources in his book 'Bhimsen Thapa and the then Nepal' (General Bhimsen Thapa ra Tatkalin Nepal). But the author has praised Bhimsen Thapa more than necessary, this is the main weakness of the book (Mishra, 2003).

In his book 'Italian Preachers in Tibet and Nepal' (Nepal ra Tibet ma Italian Dharma Pracharakharu) Italian historian Luciano Petek writes that Buddhism was the main religion in Kathmandu before the advent of Hinduism and Shaivism (Petek, translated by Surendra Sharma, 2003.) which was proved wrong by Nepali historian Prof. Tulsi Ram Vaidya. Vaidya writes that Siddhartha Gautam was initially a follower of Shaivism (Vaidya, 2003). Later he became Buddha and followed Buddhism.

French historian Silva Levy, in his book *Le-Nepal*, argued that Nepal had a marital relationship with Tshung Shron Gampo to avoid the Tibetan catastrophe (Chhetri, 2001) Historian Luciano Petek was also opinion of – “around 630 AD by a man named Anshuvarma who married his daughter to the Tibetan king Shron Shung Gampo.” (Petek, translated by Surendra Sharma, 2003). Bhukuti is the daughter of Ashuvarma and the date of her marriage has been proved to be false (Chhetri, 2001). The reign of the Tibetan king Shron Shung Gampo is considered to be between 629 AD and 650 AD. Scholars consider the marriage

of Shrong Shung Gampo and Bhrukuti to be 628, 631, 641 AD. (Vaidya, 2003). The above context confirms that Bhrukuti may not be Anshu Varma's daughter. Based on the records obtained so far, Anshuvarma's reign appears only up to 620 A.D. (Chhetri, 2001). It has been proved that Anshu Varma died in the year 621 A.D. (Vaidya, 2003). On the basis of other evidences, it has been proved that Bhrikuti isn't the daughter of Anshu Varma ( Kshetry, 2022).

In reference to Luciano Petek, after the conquest of the valley, the noses and tongues of the Kirtipures were cut off by Prithivi Narayan Shah. Tulsi Ram Vaidya writes that the nose and lips are cut and not the tongue (Vaidya, 1996). Patek wrote the story because Prithvinarayan Shah immediately expelled the Christian clergy after the conquest of the valley (Dhungel, 2017.). The English historian Kirkpatrick mentions that their nose and ears were cut off after the defeat of Kirtipur in his book an Account of the Kingdom of Nepal (Kirkpatrick, 1969).

The Italian historian Luciano Patek has analyzed Hinduism based on a letter from Pastor Giuseppe. According to him, instead of writing mouse Ganesh's vehicle, he has written Pig (Vaidya, 2003).

These are some issues prevalent in the history of Nepal. These issues became more complex and controversial because of interpretations. These controversial events are the challenge of writing today's history which has to be short out by the scholars.

Nepali historiography was not free from the criticism because still historians are writing the history of the elites. People are not in the center of historiography. Nepali historians wrote history on Kings, Ranas, elites and other winning stakeholders of the community. History will not be completed without the history of ordinary people. Scholars should emphasize and focus Subaltern history rather than elite history.

## **Conclusion**

Comparing European and English historiography Nepali history writing process is in infant position. Nepal was closed to the entire world during Rana period till 1950. With this reason Nepali was isolated from the world. Lack of interaction caused our history unwritten. Credit goes to the British and European authors who first inked Nepali history. Though they weren't aware of scientific history writing techniques and easy access to the documents, but credit goes to them to be the first. While conducting a meticulous and scientific analysis of Nepali history written by English and European historians, it became controversial and didn't support the evidence. There is a saying in history "History has been written for the Winners not the looser". World has been changing day by day. Many methods and methodologies have been introduced in the field of writing history. Still today, we are following the traditional method of history writing and following Europeans and British scholars. Many Nepali scholars have contributed in Nepali historiography but they are not free from the traditional perspective i.e. history of winners. It is the time to write Subaltern history to explore the real Nepali historiography. Hence the scholars, professors, researchers and ordinary citizen should pen Subaltern history for future generations. Future generations would be benefited if the contributing scholars could contribute to the writing of factual history accepting the challenges of writing Nepali history.

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