

BRANCHES OF HISTORY

There are several branches of History. The main ones are:

- **Conservative History** – History that is drawn towards cultural history, which favours tradition and cultural values.
- **Liberal History** – History that emphasises open mindedness, adaptive to change. Liberal History emphasises the history of individual rights and freedoms and equality of opportunity.
- **Radical/Marxist History** – History that is centred on a belief in extreme change. Marxist History is centred on a belief in extreme or radical transformation of society, mostly through revolution.

Any of these branches of History can be Africanist/Afrocentric, Eurocentric, Americanist, Sinocentric, etc.

Definitions

To understand the meaning of each of these terms and the differences among these branches of History you need to know the definition of each of the three terms.

Conservative – means being in favour of preserving the status quo and traditional values and customs, and against abrupt change. This means keeping things as they have been. Conservative History is drawn towards cultural history. This is the history that teaches more about cultural preservation; that is, preserving society as it has always been from the past into the present and so it should be into the future.

Liberal - means being open minded; able to accept change, adaptive to change.

Radical - Means believing in extreme change, just like **Marxists** who believe in extreme transformation of society, mostly through revolution.

CONSERVATIVE HISTORY

Conservative History can further be understood by discussing the term **conservatism** in more detail. **Conservatism** is a term that is used to describe political philosophies that favour tradition. Tradition refers to various religious, cultural and naturally defined beliefs and customs. Conservatives in different cultures have different goals. Some conservatives seek to preserve the status quo, which means that they want to remain what they are and their society to remain the way it has been from the past, or to reform society only slowly. Other conservatives seek to return to values of an earlier time; which is called the **status quo ante**.

At this point it is important to look at some definitions as given by two authors. **Samuel Francis** defined **conservatism** as the survival and enhancement of a particular people and its institutionalized cultural expressions.

Roger Scruton defined conservatism as the maintenance of what has been – the *status quo* or maintaining society the way it has been; this is also called the politics of delay. The purpose of this is to maintain what has existed, for as long as possible, the life and health of a social organism as inherited from the past. This means leaving things as they have been from the past.

In politics conservative parties are usually identified as right wing parties. These believe in maintaining things the way they have existed from the past and should continue to be in the present and the future society. People have different views towards Conservatism. Others believe that things should be left the way they have been in the society; hence they maintain the status quo while others return to the past and these maintain the *status quo ante*.

Conservatives argue that knowledge of history is an important resource to leaders in the society. The Liberals suggest that people who have democratic thinking can contribute to the development of the society economically, socially and politically. That is why liberals promote independence so that human society should be organized with unchangeable or inviolable human rights.

Therefore, Conservatism is a preference for the historically inherited rather than the abstract and ideal society. Conservatives prefer institutions and practices that have evolved gradually and are manifestations of continuity and stability. Conservatives insist that government must resist the temptation to change society and politics.

Conservatism stands in contrast to liberalism which is a modernizing but traditionalist movement dedicated to correcting the evils and abuses that result from the misuse of power. Conservatism must also be distinguished from the reactionary outlook which favours the restoration of a previous and usually out-moded political and social order. However, it was not until the late 18th century, in reaction to the upheavals of the French Revolution of 1789, that Conservatism began to develop distinct political attitudes and movement.

The term conservative was introduced after 1815 by supporters of the newly restored Bourbon monarchy in France. However, the originator of modern conservatism, though he never used the term himself, is generally believed to be the British parliamentarian and writer Edmund Burke. Burke wrote *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which was published in 1790. In this book Burke, a conservative himself, rejected and attacked the French Revolution in spite of supporting the American Revolution of 1779. Burke's views greatly inspired counter revolutionary theorists in the 19th century. For Burke and other pro-parliamentarian conservatives, the violence, tradition and uprooting methods of the French Revolution outweighed and corrupted its liberating ideas. This general revulsion against the violence that accompanied revolution made conservatives look back to pre-revolutionary traditions which they wished to restore.

Therefore, Conservative History is that history which teaches the maintenance of the status quo. Conservative History believes in inheriting skills and manners from the ancestors while liberal history promotes social progressiveness. Conservative beliefs hinder the development of human society while liberal history argues that social practices should be readjusted for the benefit of humankind.

Conservative Historians - are those who write that the political, social and economic systems must remain the way they are. Conservative historians argue that it is futile and dangerous for government to interfere with social economic realities. They also argue that we are what we are because we have inherited the skills, manners, morality and other cultural resources of our ancestors. According to Conservative historians knowledge of the history of one's society or country is the most important resource available to political leaders. This is because it puts the leader in touch with the society whose rules he may have to modify.

LIBERAL HISTORY

The term **Liberal History** is derived from the term **Liberalism**. Liberalism is centred on individual liberty. It is a broad set of related ideas and theories about government with individual liberty as the most important political goal. Liberalism emerged during the Age of Enlightenment. It emphasizes individual rights and equality of opportunity. Liberalism also supports extensive freedom of thought and speech as well as limitation of powers of government, the rule of law, the free exchange of ideas, the market or mixed economy and the transparent system of government. For example, Liberal democracy is centred on open free and fair elections where all citizens have equal rights by law. Liberalism rejected many conservative ideas and theories such as *divine right of kings*. They reject hereditary status and established religion. Liberals believe in social progressivism. They believe that traditions do not carry any inherent value. Social practices ought to be continuously adjusted for the greater benefit of humanity.

Liberalism is also associated with the belief that human society should be organized in accordance with unchangeable and inviolable rights of individuals. Therefore liberal history is centred on independence of thought, rejection of traditional ways of writing history, rejection of a conservative way of looking at the society. Thus, liberalism is believed to be a modernizing, anti-traditionalist movement dedicated to correcting the evils and abuses resulting from the misuse and abuse of power in society.

Liberal history emphasizes that history should be written from various perspectives but centred on man's liberty, freedoms and rights. That history should not be approached with closed minds but with open minds. Historical interpretations of facts should not be based on upholding what was but according to what your analysis reveals. Overall liberal historians write in support of democratic institutions, independence of thought, historical progress based on qualitative social change.

Liberal historians argue that only those societies that have demonstrated progressive ideas, democratic thinking, equal rights, good governance, and respect for the rule of law are capable of making qualitative progress, socially, politically and economically. Liberal history therefore revolves around man's and his institutions' progressive developments in the past, during the present and also for the future.

Liberal history puts most emphasis on the extensive rights of citizens; that even citizens should have the right to contribute to the government whilst conservatives urge the government not to

change the society and politics. This means that the citizens will have no say on the government and it cannot allow their citizens to express themselves towards the society.

RADICAL/MARXIST HISTORY

Marxist history is history influenced by the writings of Karl Marx. Karl Heinrich Marx (5 May 1818 – 14 March 1883) was a German philosopher, economist, sociologist, historian, journalist, and revolutionary socialist. He made a radical attack on capitalism during the 19th century. Marx argued that capitalism was exploitative and enslaving to the labouring working and peasant classes who produced the surplus value (profits) on which thrived the capitalists and the capitalist system. Karl Marx argued that capitalism must be overthrown by the revolutionary working and peasant classes, and replaced by socialist economic system.

The central arguments of Karl Marx's writings revolve around social class and economic problems as the main determinants of historical outcomes. Historical processes are a result of conflicts between and within social classes. Marxists argue that human society has developed historically from the simplest hunter gatherer society to the slave society, feudal society, capitalist and socialist and is expected to reach the classless society after passing through socialism/communism. Marxist history emphasizes the importance of subjective and objective factors in creating social outcomes. Marxist history points a direction of history towards an end state of history which is a classless human society. Marxist historiography aims to bring those oppressed by history to a state of self-consciousness and to arm them with tactics and strategies to use to achieve their self-consciousness in a classless society. A classless society is a society of no segregation, nepotism or corruption. Marxist historians write from a very radical tradition that is neither conservative nor liberal. They argue that historical development of human society has been as a result of the struggle of opposites which has been full of contradictions. On this basis for any development to take place there must be a struggle of opposites. During the struggle of opposites there is negation of negation. Their argument is that those oppressed by history when they are armed with their selflessness should be able to stand up for their rights and negate (overthrow/get rid of) the oppressor through a revolution.

Marxists mostly argue that the world's working classes and peasants have been most oppressed in history; therefore, they should unite and overthrow their oppressors. Marxist historiography is centred on the oppressive culture of the capitalist socio-economic system. Marxist historians argue that capitalism is at the root of man's exploitation especially the working class. They also argue that the profit seeking nature of capital is at the root of man's exploitation and can only come to an end through a socialist revolution. Therefore, Capitalism should be negated or over-thrown in order to create a classless society. Above all, Marxist historians argue that there is a law of teleological (ultimate natural) change from clashes of social forces that develop opposite forces at each stage resulting in the lower force overthrowing the ruling force until socialism is achieved. Marxist historians argue that it must be asked at each stage whether these opposite social forces can fit and can co-exist.