

**JOHN TOSH, THE PURSUIT OF HISTORY:  
AIMS, METHODS AND NEW DIRECTIONS IN  
THE STUDY OF HISTORY, LONDON:  
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*Reviewed by*  
**Muhammad Yasir Ali Khan**  
*Department of History & Civilization Studies*  
*Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan*

John Tosh writes in the start of preface to the sixth edition of the book, “The word history carries two meanings in common parlance. It refers both to what actually happened in the past and to the representation of that past in the work of historians. This book is an introduction to the history in the second sense”. This book helps the students to be aware of the historical knowledge, sources of historical knowledge and above all working methods of the historians. This composition enables the students of history to develop critical historical thinking. The whole discussion is divided into twelve chapters which can be further categorized in three parts. The first chapter initiates the debate by defining and explaining the historical awareness. It describes and explains the historical awareness by going through the academic explanation and interpretation of the terms like ‘past, individual and collective memory’. It also explains the role of belief and sense of identity on the scope and limitation of historical awareness. Second chapter, *the uses of history*, connects the question of historical knowledge with the explanation of uses of history based on basic concepts of the historians involved in writing history. It explains that uses of history are defined by the writer. Writer’s stand point while narrating historical knowledge lays the basis of utilization of history. It also explains that how an impulse in the present defolds the past whose understand can facilitate the future. *Mapping of history*, third chapter, explains the distinction and superiority of process of history writing from the mere record of political events. It elaborates that the major concern of history to describe political past and its confinement to the political utility is contested and challenged by the work of

historians in the recent time. Recent historical development encompasses almost all the aspects of human life going beyond the limits of political present and past. Discussion proceeds to the elaboration of materials by the historians in the fourth chapters. Historians have plenty of sources and they define the way of utilization of these raw sources. So the historical source is basically linked with the personality and expertise of the historian as it is the historian who confers upon a source the entitlement of historical source. In the next chapter the discussion of methodology is enhanced to the level of utilization of historical source. Some authors explain the source by putting their questions and some abstract the questions from the natural flow of the source itself. This chapter also details the immediate and wider contextualization of the sources. This contextualizing helps the writer and student of history to avoid any kind of reductionism while writing and recording the past. Sixth chapter, *writing and interpretation*, distinguishes the historical writing from an ordinary writing of history. Ordinary writing, it maintains, borrows already existing question as compared to the historian who raises and distinguishes his own questions. Historian's interpretation, based on the distinguished questions, enfolds the past on the intent of present for the sake of future. Seventh chapter, *the limits of historical knowledge*, encompasses the discussions built around the nature of history and historical knowledge. Positivists, it explains, bestow upon history the status of science on the other hand post-modernists argue for the subjective and ever-changing aspect of the history and historical knowledge. Next chapter explains the relation between history and structural nature of social theories. Structuralism defines and limits the historical knowledge by reducing it to particularities. These particularities like Marxism when applied on history encourage the codification and objectification of past by reducing it to a particular structure of understanding. The last three chapters describe the events and developments in the recent time which brought revolutionary developments in both the process of history and procedures of writing history. Cultural turn in the history challenged the structural approaches implied on the understanding of history. The question of gender issue and the methods and approaches

of the subalterns go even step ahead of the culturalism besides the emergence of oral history as a discipline.

This book is amazingly helpful for the graduate and post graduate student of history besides a common reader of history. Discussion in this book is divided into clusters of understandings regarding history as past, history as process, nature and use of historical knowledge, categorization of historical knowledge and recent philosophical orientation of all these aspects. The reading of this book can be a good start in the pursuit of history both as a process and as a subject.