IV

Print Culture, Persian Historiography and Translation

Survey of Indo-Persian Historiography

Indo-Persian historiography had a long and rich history prior to the coming of the East India Company, and although our main concern is with the impact of colonial rule on this genre of writing, a brief survey of it can set the context for later developments. Before discussing the theme of print culture with reference to Indo-Persian historiography, it is relevant to introduce some landmark texts of this genre that were written in medieval India. The works discussed below are the ones that were considered important by the British for understanding Indian history, and were thus printed by the government or private individuals with this objective.

The earliest Persian historical works in India date back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and were written in the Delhi Sultanate. Although Al Biruni’s famous treatise on India was written in Arabic, it represents the earliest major work produced by a scholar of the Persianate world written in India. Historians of Delhi Sultanate such as Minhaj-us Siraj Juzjani (Tabaqat-i Nasiri) and Ziauddin Barani (Tarikh-i Firozshahi and Fatawa-i Jahandari) modelled their works of those written in the Perso-Islamic world. After a brief period of decline coinciding with Timur’s invasion of India and the period of the Afghan Lodi dynasty the rich tradition of history writing was revived during the Mughal period. History was one of many genres in which books were written; the others included autobiography, collections of poetry, ethical treatises, belles-lettres, manuals of technical prose and administration, conversational discourses, and advice literature (diwans, akhlaq, insha, malfuzat, nasihat), biographical dictionaries (tazkira), and, of course, political histories. The was also a rich corpus of literature on themes relating to religion.
The Mughal emperor Akbar was both the subject and the patron of many Persian-language texts. Akbar's translation projects spanned many languages: on the one hand, he had his grandfather Babur's memoirs translated from Turkish to Persian, while on the other hand he also commissioned the translation of many Sanskrit texts into Persian. These include the Persian translation of the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, prepared by 'Abd al-Qadir Badauni with the assistance of a team of Sanskrit scholars in 1584. Composed in Persian, Abul Fazl's *Akbar Nama* and *A'in-i Akbari* are the most important, the latter indeed being unique, texts for understanding history and institutions of the Empire Mughal. The *A'in-i Akbari*, an elaborate gazetteer, is fundamental for all studies on the administration of the Mughal Empire. The most important of the court or official histories of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan's reign, is that of Abd-ul Hamid Lahori's who wrote *Padshahnama*. Texts produced in a later period, such as *Alamgirnama* by Mahammad Kazim Amin and *Muntakhab-ul Lubab* by Khafi Khan were also important representatives of the genre of traditional narrative history. The rendition of Indo-Persian historiography continued throughout the eighteenth century. The *Siyar-ul Mutakharin*, authored by Ghulam Ali Azad Husaini Bilgrami who served both Emperor Shah Alam and the British is a critical analysis of British policy in Bengal in the eighteenth century. Many of the prose and verse works devoted to the emperors are simply continuation of the narrative and panegyric conventions of earlier periods, except that the events they describe reflect the precipitated deterioration of the empire during the first four decades of the eighteenth century.434

**Indo-Persian Historiography: Types and Salient features**

According to Peter Hardy, general histories of the Muslim world had come into vogue between the ninth and eleventh centuries. These general histories included the history of pre-Islamic Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, the story of the patriarchs and prophets to the time of Muhammad, the life of the Prophet and accounts of the caliphs. Some included

information about Greece, China and Pre-Islamic Persia as well.435 C.E. Bosworth has skillfully enumerated the four sub genres into which Indo-Persian historiography is divided.436 The first kind is the general history from the time of Adam, and then the history of the Muslim community in a particular region. The second includes the *manaqib* or *faza'il* type of prose eulogy, usually, but not necessarily, of a ruler. The third was didactic history ('Mirror of Prince') in order to serve the purpose of instruction and trade.

Peter Hardy's argument is that Indo-Persian historiography of the medieval period lacked critical treatment of source material and events. However, we cannot expect historians living in the medieval period to adhere to our modern notions of history writing, and neither can we judge them by our standards.

Apart from the classificatory scheme offered by Bosworth, there is another, more detailed classification offered by Abdur Rashid, who characterizes historical works composed in India between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries as either official histories, government records, biographies and memoirs, non-official histories, local or provincial histories, *munsha'at* or collections of letters, gazetteers and official manuals and finally, literary works.437

While one section of this chapter deals with printed Persian history books (imperial, regional and universal) and the reasons for their publication, the other section examines those Persian histories that were translated into English. The latter sheds important light on translation in a colonial context, while the former maps out the British attempt to classify sources as 'reliable' or otherwise to create a hierarchy of historical sources based on criteria devised by themselves.

437 Abdur Rashid, 'The Treatment of History by Muslim Historians in Mughal Official and Biographical Works', in *Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon*, p. 143.
The British Treatment of the Indian Past and Printed Persian Histories

According to Ranajit Guha, some of the very first and most important works on Indian history written from a British standpoint belong to the period of thirty years between the grant of Diwani (1765) and Permanent Settlement (1793). Quite a few of these ranged widely over time from antiquity to the most recent past; others were content to take a relatively foreshortened view of the past going back no further than the thirteenth century. All were conspicuous by their interest in the historical aspects of the land question—an interest they shared with the Company's administration which provided most of their authors with their livelihood.438

It is possible to investigate why a particular Persian text was chosen for publication under the English East India Company. The preface from Persian printed works often gives a historian a good idea of why that book was chosen to be published. In the Ain-i Akbari of Abul Fazl, edited by H. Blochmann, and published in Calcutta by the Baptist Mission Press in 1873.

In the Ain, therefore, we have a picture of Akbar’s government in its several departments, and of its relations to the different ranks and mixed races of his subjects. Whilst in most Muhammadan histories we hear of the endless turmoil of war and dynastical changes, and are only reminded of the existence of a people when authors make a passing allusion to famines and similar calamities, we have in the Ain the governed classes brought to the foreground: men live and move before us, and the great questions of the time, axioms then believed in and principles then followed, phantoms then chased after, ideas then prevailing, and successes then obtained, are placed before our eyes in truthful, and therefore vivid, colours.

Accurate and complete picture of Akhbari’s administration; an understanding of ruling class; the relationship between rulers and subjects, the judgment was stand and so was the selection of the text.

If the publication of well-known Persian works of history was one activity that engaged the attention of colonial historians and scholars, then writing histories following the already established Persian model was another. In a recent study of the tradition of history writing in Bengal, Kumkum Chatterjee discusses several eighteenth century colonial accounts of India’s past written in narrative style, modelled on the Persian tradition of writing history or tarikh. She finds similarities between the genre of Persian history writing and English accounts of the Mughal empire. We have already mentioned the different genres of history writing that existed in India when Orientalists set about writing the history of India in the nineteenth century. According to Chatterjee, most colonialist accounts connected the decline of the Mughal empire with the rise of the English East India Company. Another theme that runs through the narratives of the English authors and their reflections on the Mughal empire is that of Oriental or Asiatic despotism. She notes that Orientalist scholars who mastered Sanskrit are well known (such as Halhed, Colebrooke and others) whereas those who mastered Persian (such as Alexander Dow, Francis Gladwin and William Kirkpatrick) are not. Thus, the Sanskrit based Orientalist has become the dominant face of British Orientalism in India. She shifts the focus on Persian based Orientalist endeavours, and concludes that these scholars were familiar with Persian literature (including accounts of past rulers and their modes of governance), and that their own views on Mughal governance were derived directly from the authors of Persian accounts.439 For example, Alexander Dow’s History of Hindustan (1770) drew upon Persian sources, and so did the eight volumes of History of India as Told by Its Own Historians, brought out by H. M. Elliott and J. Dowson between 1867 and 1877,440 and Briggs’s translation of Firishta.

440 This voluminous project of Henry Elliot that was published after his death by John Dowson comprised translated extracts from over 150 works, principally in Persian, covering a period from the ninth to the eighteenth centuries.
The importance of Persian histories for the historical projects undertaken by the British is reiterated in the works of Sir William Hunter (1840-1900). Hunter wrote a few unnamed articles in the Calcutta Review and The Englishman analyzing the nature of the Wahabi creed, and in another sphere projected the image of the Muslims as the true preceptors of the English in India. He stated that the Hindus had no historical sense, and their literary instinct had been ‘spent itself on religious poetry and the drama’. On the other hand, among the Muslims, such instinct found a clear outlet in history. ‘The Semitic race, and the conquering creed which it founded, have spread the Arabian passion for Annals from the white cities of the Guadalquivir to the rice-swamps of the Irawadi’. Whenever a part of India came into permanent contact with the Muslims, ‘its history emerges from the wonderland of Temple Archives and Sacred Song; and becomes only a question of patient industry, in searching out the fragmentary allusions to it in the Musalman manuscripts’. 441 Hunter thus indicated that the Muslim histories of India helped the British to ‘historicize’ the Indian past, as it were, and the early English histories on the sub-continent were mainly translations from Persian sources.

A variety of medieval Persian sources preserved in manuscripts were published in the nineteenth-century, the largest number of works being of history.442 The historical work printed can be divided into general history, general history of India, history of the Timurids (Mughals), and history of Regions.

The reason for the Nawal Kishore Press publishing Persian histories written during the Mughal rule were firstly, to provide accessibility of Persian manuscripts and secondly to bring them among the vernacular readership through translation into Urdu. Thus, NKP reprinted the two famous works in the mid-1860s; viz. Siyar-ul Mut‘akharin in 1860 and Tarikh-i Firishta in 1864... The publication of Akbarnama from the NKP in 1866-7 was done under the patronage of the Maharaja of Patiala, where the press had established a branch. Thereafter the A’in Akbari was reprinted in three volumes in 1869. The book proved to be so popular that in 1887 its fifth edition was published.

Muntakhab-ut Tawarikh in 1868 and Tabaqat-i Akbari in 1875 were published from this Press. The NKP also published histories of the Islamic world as well as regional histories. Among the former, the press issued Jam'ī-ğut Tavarikh (a contemporary world history by Qazi Faqir Muhammad) in 1871, Tariikh-i Tabari (an abridged Persian translation of Tabari’s universal history) and Rauzat-us Safa of Mir Khwand in 1874. As for regional histories, the press published ’Imad-us Sa’adat by Ghulam Ali Khan Naqvi in 1864. In 1876 Nawal Kishore issued Saulat-i Afghani, a substantial work of over 700 pages by Muhammad Zardar Khan, which provided a historical account of the Afghan people and its clans. As this list of books indicates, there was a demand for the publication of a wide variety of Persian histories: court chronicles (listed above in the chronological order in which they were published by the NKP), general histories of the Islamic world, as well as regional histories. As for the language policy of the NKP, Ulrike Stark has argued that the press followed a policy of ‘dual language’, providing both inexpensive reprints of Persian religious and literary classics on the one hand, while also promoting the Indo-Persian literary heritage through Urdu translations. As mentioned earlier, NKP also printed translations of historical works in Urdu and the majority were to the Indo-Persian historiography.

On the subject of Urdu histories, it is relevant to note that these gained currency after 1857. In his study of Muslim historiography in India after 1857, Muhammad Aslam Syed argues that the failure of the uprising of 1857 had a two-fold impact upon the Indian Muslims: the institutions on which they had relied for centuries were undermined; and this also accompanied by a hostile treatment of their history and religion by the British administrator-historian. He divides the work produced by Muslim historians between 1857 and 1914 into three categories. In the first, he includes histories written by authors belonging to the newly emerging middle class, who were influenced by western rationalism, and who he terms ‘Modernists’. In the second category he includes the

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443 Completed in 1250/1834-5. It is simply a reproduction of some important works on history. It was republished in 1874, 1897, and Story mentions an edition from Calcutta in 1836.
446 Muhammad Aslam Syed, Muslim Response to the West: Muslim Historiography in India 1857-1914, National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Islamabad, 1988, p. 15.
‘Traditionalists’, that is, those ulama who re-emphasized the medieval interpretations of the Islamic past. The third group consists mostly of poets, journalists and novelists who were stimulated by the Western influence on the literary forms of Urdu language, and whom he terms the ‘New School’.\textsuperscript{447} This interest the part of Indian Muslim intellectuals in their own heritage bore fruit in the organization of the Muhammadan Educational Conference due to the efforts of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. The Conference was entrusted with the task of meeting annually to assess the intellectual growth of the community. One of the basic tasks of the Conference was to collect, edit, and print Persian works and the other source material so that an accurate assessment of India’s history in Europe and India can be obtained.\textsuperscript{448}

**Printed Regional Histories in Persian**

Whereas most scholars have focused on ‘grand’ Persian narratives that cover either a huge ground chronologically or have a perspective from the centre (the court), a neglected sphere of study has been the genre of regional histories written in Persian (some of which were published by the NKP, as mentioned in the previous section). These histories are of vital importance as they focus our attention away from the centre to a vibrant culture of history writing from or about regions. An analysis of a list of some of these works (see Appendix IV, No. II for table) is illuminating, and will be attempted after a brief survey of the context of their production.

The decline of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century encouraged the subadars (governors of provinces) and regional chiefs to become practically independent of the centre. In every province and principality, the standards set by the imperial court were followed in the region in the field of literature, arts, architecture, dress and social etiquette. The first half of nineteenth century, from the accession of Akbar Shah II in 1806 to the deposition of Bahadur Shah in 1857, is significant for the Persian literature produced during this period. Centres of literary activity which developed away from Delhi were Awadh, Hyderabad, Sind, Rampur, Tonk, Bhopal, Karnatic, Lahore, Multan,

\textsuperscript{447} Ibid, pp. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{448} Ibid, pp. 41-42.
Bhawalpur, Azimabad and Murshidabad. The regional rulers (nawabs and rajas) were keen on getting their history recorded, and employed scholars to accomplish the task. The emergence of print gave additional opportunity to patronize scholars and commission histories that could be published and widely circulated. Thus, history constituted an important item on the Indian publisher's list.

As far as regional history is concerned, a series of articles on the history of Rohilkand were published in the monthly magazine of the Rohilkhand Literary Society at Bareilly. In 1866 M. Kempson in his report mentioned a History of Rohilkhund which was prepared by the Bareilly Literary Society. Regional history was prominent in either tazkira or kulliyat, and especially in the genre of Shahr-i Ashub (poems lamenting the loss of life and property in the city of a particular region during the later half of the eighteenth-century). At the invitation and patronage of the Raja of Patiala, Nawal Kishore Press opened a printing press in the princely state of Patiala with the express purpose of launching a newspaper, Patiala Akhbar. The Patiala branch produced a historiographical work entitled Tarikh-i Gorakhpur in 1872. Thus, the proliferation of printing presses in different parts of India seems to be directly related to the production of regional histories. As different rulers commissioned their regional histories, publishers started their operations in order to meet this new demand.

Bibliotheca Indica and Publication of Persian Historical Works

The Asiatic Society of Bengal was established on 1784 for a systematic study of oriental subjects. Of these, the history of Muslim rule in India constituted a major area. The Asiatic Society of Bengal rendered valuable services to the cause of oriental learning and

450 Ibid.
452 Stark, Empire of Books, pp. 177-78. (see Appendix for chapter IV, no. II for table of Regional Histories in Persian).
literature of which the publication of rare and valuable oriental texts, and their rendering into English was perhaps the most important. The printing of oriental texts with translation into English was first proposed to Asiatic Society by 'the Brethren of Baptist Mission at Serampore'. The Bibliotheca Indica (Collection of Oriental Works) was to become an important series of works to be published under the patronage of the Court Of Directors of the East India Company and under the superintendence of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.\textsuperscript{453}

The Asiatic Society approved a plan to start a monthly series of publication named Bibliotheca Indica under the editorship of a competent scholar and Indian scholars of Sanskrit (pandits). The object of Bibliotheca Indica series was 'to place in the hands of the future historian, the best original materials for compiling a history of this country, and the plan proposed for accomplishing our task is, to publish texts of the most trustworthy authors, giving the preference, when possible to writers contemporary with the events their histories chronicle.'\textsuperscript{454} The British were attempting to achieve many tasks simultaneously: they were judging historical works as being 'trustworthy' or otherwise, then creating a hierarchy among these works, the criteria for being placed at an elevated position being whether or not the historian had lived in the times about which he was writing. They also declared their own concern for the future historian, who was to be indebted to their project of hierarchical classification.

The work on the series started in 1848. The total number of books published by the Society was about 140, of which 111 were published under the imprint of Bibliotheca Indica. The works may be divided into two heads: Semitic and Indic. The Semitic series included standard law books in Arabic, all the standard works in Persian on the general history of India, together with a critical edition and English translation of the \textit{Ain-i-Akbari}, the well known Gazetteer translation of Akbar’s empire.\textsuperscript{455} It was different from the NWK edition insofar as it was carefully edited by collecting various manuscripts. The

\textsuperscript{453} Delwar Hussain, \textit{A Study of Nineteenth Century Historical Works on Muslim Rule in Bengal: Charles Stewart to Henry Beveridge}, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1978, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{454} Ibid, p. 88.
The hallmark of Bibliotheca Indica was preparation of standard and critical edition of texts, something which was not done earlier. (for details of other Persian books see Appendix for chapter IV no. III).

In so far as Mughal history is concerned, it has been argued that modern scholars have approached it from two perspectives: either to find historical support for contemporary opinion or historical explanations of and solutions for immediate dilemmas, or to place the Mughal empire in general classification in world history or political sociology. Since this celebration of the Mughals coincided with fresh attempts by the British (and other Europeans) to analyze Mughal institutions in the aftermath of 1857, they acquired a specific character. Douglas Streusand has emphasized the importance of the Bibliotheca Indica series in changing the way historians have looked at the Mughal past, from William Jones onwards. He states that this publication among others enabled the positivistic history-writing of the early twentieth century.

Translators of Persian Histories

Translation has often been characterized as a ‘central act’ of European imperialism. Tejaswini Niranjana has suggested that the practice of translation shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relationships of power that operate under colonialism. Translation was deployed in different kinds of discourses—philosophy, historiography, education—to renew and perpetuate colonial domination. She has also stated that through translation, the colonized were represented in a manner that justified colonial domination. She states that translation ‘fixes’ colonized cultures, and makes them unchanging. It is the opinion of Michael Dodson that translation made available legal-cultural information for the administration and rule of the non-west. He argues that its

460 Niranjana, Sitting Translation, p. 2.
importance lay in that it provided resources for the construction and representation of the colonized as ‘Europe’s civilizational other’. In his opinion, translation was ‘a strategic means for representing “otherness” to primarily domestic British reading audiences’.461

In order to examine the views of Niranjana and Dodson in the context of Persian, print culture it will be useful to discuss some early printed works that were English translations of Persian texts. Examples of such translated works include Francis Gladwin’s Transactions in Bengal which was translated from the Persian Tawarikh-i Bangala and published in Calcutta in 1788 and Haji Mustafa’s translation of Siyar-ul Mut’akharin (Calcutta, 1786).462 Similarly, Charles Stewart devoted his time to the translation of Persian texts into English. Out of this project came The History of Bengal written from a study of Persian sources and published European works.463 In this work, Stewart used fourteen Persian manuscripts, of which twelve were from Tipu Sultan’s library.464

The preface of books translated from Persian to English usually contain the aims with which they were published in addition to the information about the translator, place of publication, etc. The preface, therefore, is a useful source for studying the objective and strategy of translation as well as their implications for the colonial rule and the print culture. Here we will examine some of these prefaces with a view to interrogating the text as well as the motivation underlying its production. We must note that many of the translated works were in fact regional histories or biographies of regional rulers.

In 1842 Colonel W. Miles of the East India Company translated and published a Persian book under the title The History of Hydur Naik, otherwise styled Shums Ul Moolk, Ameer ud Dowla, Nawab Hudur Ali Khan Bahadoor, Hudur Jung, Nawab of the Karnatic Balaghut. This translation was based on a work originally written by Mir Husain Ali Khan Kirmani, and the translation was funded by the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland. In his preface to the printed book, Colonel Miles wrote

461 Dodson, Orientalism, Empire, and national Culture India 1770-1880, p. 118.
462 Hussain, Study of Nineteenth Century Historical Works on Muslim Rule in Bengal, p. 13.
463 Ibid, p. 18.
about the problems he had faced during translating the work on account of the specific characteristics of the Persian language. As he put it,

The Persian Language, as any one at all acquainted with it is aware, delights in inflated description, pompous imagery, sounding epithets, and in all extravagant figures; and according to the character of the writer, this genius or affectation of the language is frequently carried to the verge of absurdity— that is, absurdity as measured by our scale. To suppress or soften these peculiarities when very wild, and retain them when deserving to be kept, is I think, indispensable, and in my translation of this work, I have tried hard to conform to this rule, although I may not perhaps have always succeeded in my endeavour.

Thus, the author stated his intention to produce a translation as faithful to the original as possible. Colonel Miles also indicated that although he was aware of other works on the history of Mysore by English and French writers, he would not be including them in his translation, as 'still we have never seen what those two individuals, or any of their nation, have said of themselves; if we except a portion, and that I believe a small one, of Tipu's letters, translated by the late Colonel Kirkpatrick.' He further compared English histories with the Persian one by stating that their concerns and perspective were entirely different.

For these reasons, I have thought it best to allow Hydur's historian to tell his tale without comment. This account, compared with those above mentioned, will, it may be presumed, furnish a tolerably fair guide for the general historian. There is, however, only a partial resemblance between the English histories of the wars in the Karnatic and this; only a small part of this relating to the English wars, while, on the contrary, the English histories contain very little else.

Colonel Miles' preface is a good example of a translation that was done in order to allow 'native' historians to speak in their own voice. His ideas about the importance of reading a Persian history for a period for which many English and French histories were also available, indicates the esteem in which he held Persian historiographical traditions.
In 1786, Captain Jonathan Scott (who served the East India Company and also functioned as private personal translator to Warren Hastings) published in London his translation from Persian into English of The Memoirs of Eradut Khan, who he described as a 'nobleman of Hindostan'. The memoir was said to contain interesting anecdotes about Aurangzeb and his successors Shah Alam and Jahandar Shah, in which these one could find 'the causes of the very precipitate decline of the Mogul Empire in India.' Thus, the very fact that such a work was translated by an employee of the East India company indicates the concern that company had with the Mughal past of India. As Kumkum Chatterjee has indicated, British accounts of the collapse of the Mughal empire depended heavily on Persian sources such as this one. Thus, while some British authors were writing histories of India in English, these histories were based on Persian texts produced in India, and translated into English by yet other British scholars.

Translations of texts were done also to identify and study such ethnic groups as were considered useful for colonial administration. Major J. Browne translated into English a work on the orders of the Directors of the East India Company that was printed in London in 1788. Browne indicated in the preface that he had served as the English minister at the court of Shah Alam, and in that period had acquired considerable knowledge of states bordering Agra and Delhi. He had met two Hindu residents of Lahore who possessed an account of the rise of the Sikhs written in Nagri character, and also acquired an abridged Persian translation of this text from them, which he then rendered into English. Addressing the court of Directors, he emphasized that he was convinced that 'the rapid progress of this sect, will hereafter render a knowledge of them, their strength, and government, very important to the administration of Bengal.' Thus, the history of one part of India was seen to be an important example for the rest of the country. This book provides an example of a translation twice removed from the original. What had once been a manuscript was transformed after translation into a printed text that could be circulated much more widely, and thus made more accessible. Thus, translation and printing worked in tandem to disseminate 'useful' texts more widely.

Yet another work entitled *British India Analyzed: The Provincial and Revenue Establishments of Tippoo Sultaun and of Mahomedan and British Conquerors in Hindostan* was printed in London in 1793 in three parts. One part, originally published in Calcutta in 1792, was titled *The Mysorean Revenue Regulations* and translated by Burrish Crisp. In the advertisement for the book, it was stated that the original belonged to Colonel John Murray who acquired it during the Coimbatore campaign, and the book was important as it was the ‘most accurate delineation of the modern Mahomedan government that has appeared’. The translator also expressed his gratitude to Colonel John Murray while expressing his disappointment at not being able to find reliable people in Calcutta to translate Malabar dialects or to explain provincial terms. He was thus forced to explain the terms from context, and apologized for the errors that may have crept in. This episode indicates the dependence of British translators on native informants for information about term etc. When such a native informant could not be found (for a language other than Persian, as in this example), the work necessarily suffered.

*The Life of Hafiz ool Moolk,* was the translation of the biography of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, Nawab of Rohilkhand, was a book written by his son, Nawab Mustajab Khan Bahadur titled *Gulistan-i Rahmat.* It was abridged and translated by Charles Elliott in 1831 and printed in London. In his introduction to the work, Elliott stated that he had omitted many trivial episodes from the original. These omissions included

...the repeated encomiums lavished by the Nuwab on the generosity and intrepidity of his lamented parent, though honourable to his feelings as a son, would be deemed extravagant by the generality of readers, and indeed would scarcely admit of translation.

Elliott also provided the reason for translating the book. According to him the Nawab’s memory in Rohilkhand was ‘held in the highest veneration’ and he had a distinguished career for over thirty years, and that his life ‘may furnish some materials to aid in the compilation of a history of that period: and with this view, I have taken considerable pains to correct some chronological errors in the original.’ Thus, we get a sense of the translator in this case not only deciding which work should be translated and why
(thereby acting as a ‘filter’), but also deciding which episodes were trivial and did not deserve to be translated. Elliott also told the reader that his translation would be at variance with Hamilton’s History of the Rohillas as Hamilton obtained his information from the Nawab of Awadh, who was, of course, a rival of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, and because ‘as that work was published about the time of Mr. Hastings’s trial, it might have been intended to frame an excuse for his permitting a British army to join in the attack on Hafiz in 1774.’

A slightly later work was Mirat-i Ahmadi, also regional history, which was written in Persian by the revenue minister of Gujarat, Ali Muhammad Khan. It was partially translated into English, annotated and introduced by James Bird, and published in London in 1835. Bird provided the rationale for the English translation of the work by stating that it had been done so that Europeans would understand ‘Asiatics’ better, and come to possess an accurate as well as comprehensive knowledge of their way of life:

Though the acquirement of these, and the cultivation of oriental literature, may be of use, in enlarging our views of general history and geography, they serve a yet more important purpose; in this country, by removing the prejudices of early education, by interesting the feelings of Europeans for the welfare of Asiatics, and disposing the former to treat as equals those whom they had been taught to consider as inferiors....It is incumbent on us, as rulers of India, to possess an accurate knowledge of its customs, manners, religious opinions, history, and commerce; and regarding the early state of such there is yet a wide field of interesting research. The influence of the Greek kingdom of Bactria on Sanskrit literature; the knowledge which the Romans possessed of India, and the state of their commerce with the country; the intercourse of the primitive Arabs and eastern Christians with the Hindus; the incorporation of foreign tribes with the aborigines; the institutions of their civil society; and rules of their military policy, are subjects of intense interest, that may be successfully elucidated by closely studying the
Greek and Roman authors, in connexion [sic] with Sanskrit literature, and the historical and geographical books in Arabic and Persian. 466

Bird also emphasized the unique nature of his recovery of the text via translation by stating that no manuscript copy of this particular work could be found in Europe. He acknowledged the help he received in translating the book from a Persian munshi by the name of Mir Khairat Ali ‘Mushtaq’. 467 Thus, the history of this one book ties features the many motifs that we have been tracing: the Orientalist obsession with knowledge that was as accurate as it was comprehensive, and the role of Indian informants in the production of colonial knowledge, the popularizing of a book by the event of its translation and publishing (even though it entered the English, and not Persian print culture). We now move on to the uses to which these translated and printed Persian works were put.

The Many Lives of Persian Historical Sources

Just as written histories were an important source for the expansion of knowledge, so were they relevant for identity formation. While ancient Indian history provided an ideal of excellence, medieval history compelled scholars writing in Hindi to grapple with a more painful and problematic past: a past that was, according to their narrative, full of decadence, defeat, division, and subjection. 468 For Orsini, early colonialist histories from the outset signified the power of the colonial state and its agents to appropriate (through translation and subsequent interpretation and judgment) India’s past, clear away the undergrowth of mythology, and to create in the cleared space, a proper ‘scientific’ history that was aimed at helping them to govern India and presenting to its Indian subject—hitherto a people without history—a proper account of their past, crafted on the basis of scientific evidence and reason (the tools of the enlightenment scholar). In the nineteenth century, the fragmented field of history was partly transformed and unified by orientalists.

467 Ibid, Preface, p. I. Bird appreciated his assistant by saying that had he lived in other times than ours, and under a different system, he would, in consideration of his knowledge of the Persian language and of Mohammedan history, have risen to offices of great rank and emolument.
468 Orsini, Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940, p. 507.
and by the shift from court, sect, and family to print and the public sphere. Persian histories were therefore translated to function as part of this project.

Partha Chatterjee has argued that British historians put forward a theory of medieval decline that corresponded to their belief that Muslim rule in India was a period of despotism, misrule and anarchy, and therefore the British were required to amend matters. As a result, for Indian nationalists too ancient India became the classical age, while the period between the ancient and the contemporary was the dark age of medievalism. Chatterjee argues that this pattern was supported by European historiography. Just as Europeans were proud of Greek classical heritage, so were English educated Bengalis of Vedic civilization. Chatterjee discussed how Persian sources could be available through British writers' mediation for a people supposedly devoid of historical consciousness. However, Chatterjee's arguments in this case seem to be overstated. Some accounts written by the British, such as that of Sleeman, praised the Mughal state. A landmark in later British historiography on Muslim rule in India, Mountstuart Elphinstone's The History of India: The Hindu and Mahomedan Periods, published in 1841, contained a favourable account of Hindu civilization in the pre-Muslim era as well as about the prosperous and well-governed epoch of Muslim history under Akbar and Shah Jahan. This book became popular in Indian Universities; after 1857, when it was translated into Persian, it achieved a wider circulation.

Chatterjee's point about the constructs of colonial historiography has been reiterated by Vasant Kaiwar taking ancient India as an example. According to Kaiwar even as British historians demonized Muslim rule in India, they glorified the ancient Indian past. The Aryan model of history in the nineteenth century had two main pillars, one Greek, the other Indian. British writers carried over the myth of the all-conquering Aryan peoples-or Aryan race, once racialist thought had established itself—from the realms of philosophy and religious studies into history and anthropology. In British

469 Ibid, p. 178.
471 Ibid, p. 98.
472 Syed, Muslim Response to the West, p. 24.
histories, argues Kaiwar, there was a narrative of invaders, or migrants, who brought technology, linguistic refinement, and philosophy from central Asia or southern Russia to the subcontinent and were, where necessary, fell free to employ techniques of ethnic cleansing against inferior races. The Aryan-Dravidian divide in India was posited as a racial divide between light-skinned northerners and dark-skinned southerners, with the former, naturally, superior and ever victorious. This, in turn, says Kaiwar, generated other myths about lower-caste people in north India, while those of South were termed as the aboriginal Dravidian people. Later historiography would turn Muslims into Aryan civilization’s adversaries. Another enduring legacy of the Aryan model of history is the division of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods (corresponding to the ancient, medieval, and modern periods of European history), established originally by British and later by nationalist historians. This division originally served a polemical purpose for the British, who claimed that they were in India to restore the glories of ancient India by liberating India from Muslim rule. Kaiwar terms the Aryan model of history as an attempt to write world history keeping race at the centre-stage.

A deeper insight into the process by which Western knowledge of the Orient is offered by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, who argues that the historiographical selection of certain Persian medieval court chronicles to reconstruct the Indian past played a strategic role in constituting ‘the west’ as the site of progress and innovation and ‘the orient’ as the locus of backwardness and tradition. Targhi believes that in its early phase modern Oriental studies did not constitute a discourse of domination but reciprocal relation between European and Indian scholars. In this view he differs from the classic Saidian position of the colonial subject without agency. Targhi then traces the transformation of Orientalist inquiry into a discourse of western domination, which

resulted in the obliteration of all traces of ‘Oriental’ agency, voice, writing, and creativity. Thus, his analysis is capable of plotting changes in the situation. The colonial subject was not entirely without agency; he had it, then lost it. This happened, according to him, with the rise of science in the eighteenth century, following which the contribution of non-European scholars was increasingly marginalized and deemed nonobjective. 475

In an earlier section, we have discussed the case of Persian books that were translated into English for a British audience. In keeping with this section’s focus on the uses of which history was put in the colonial set up in India, we will now consider some examples of English texts translated into Persian, this time for an Indian audience. It is relevant here to refer to a book that was translated from English to Persian in 1859 and published by the Baptist Mission Press. The book was John C. Marshman’s History of India: From Remote Antiquity to the Accession of Mogul Dynasty to which the translator Maulvi Abdur Rahman Gorakhpuri, gave the title Tarikh-i Hindustan. The translation was patronized by Md. Bahram Shah (Tipu Sultan’s grandson) who dedicated it to the then Viceroy Lord Canning, stating that it had been translated in an ‘easy and homely style, agreeably to the instructions of the undernamed, with profound respect and in fervent hope of meeting with His Excellency’s benign approbation’. The book is in two parts and sixteen chapters: the first part (six chapters) is a general history of India, its geography, and history of Hindus generally. The second part has nine chapters and it is a description of the period from the beginning of Arab and Turkish rule in India till the arrival of the Portuguese. The last chapter is a separate treatment of the Portuguese. The translator stated that the book was an abridged version of the original as the bulky original was too tedious to read. He claimed that it would make readers aware about the events in Hindustan from the time of ‘Hindu kings’ till the arrival of the Portuguese. He also maintained that the ancient history of India was full of incorrect facts and myths as old documents had been destroyed. He said that although few histories of ancient India had been written in the Islamic period as well, it was under the British government that

ancient history was well researched. The British wrote facts correctly about ancient India carefully, and they were continuing this work. In chapter sixteen, about the arrival of Portuguese to India, the translator wrote that they came to the Deccan under the Bahmanids and this marked the conquest of Hindustan by Christianity. After 200 years of Portuguese rule, the British were able to take over Hindustan and this was divine fate. They took Hindustan from Muslims in the same way as Muslims were able to take it from the Hindus.476

Persian was thus considered a suitable medium through which the Indian past was selected, interpreted and then transmitted to an Indian audience via British mediation. Indians were thus taught a version of their own history, in their own language. The same was the case with Urdu, which became another effective medium of transmitting the Indian past to students. Tarikh-i Firishta, for example, was translated into Urdu and was being used as a textbook in the Delhi College for Arabic and Persian classes. In a study of colonial history textbooks in India, Powell states that most of the textbooks in the 1830s and 1840s, whether in English or Urdu, treated pre-tenth-century history as an ill-defined era preceding what was termed the ‘arrival of the Ghaznavids’. The entire pre-tenth century was passed over rapidly and perfunctorily, mainly on the ground that it was not possible to distinguish ‘historical fact’ from ‘fable’ until the well-documented ‘Mohammedan era’.477

Many Urdu translations of Persian and English histories of India, mostly from the Delhi College press in the mid-1840s (not all of which were intended for school or college use) were published, which mostly neglected the pre-tenth century past. Among such regional and dynastic works may be included the Urdu translation, by a teacher called Nur Muhammad of the Tarikh-i Mughaliya (History of The Mughals), which was taught in the Persian Department of the Delhi College from 1849 onwards. The same

476 Translation mine.

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teacher also translated the *Tarikh-i Bengal*, which was taught, among other places, in the science classes of Delhi College’s ‘Oriental’ section from 1853 onwards.\(^{478}\)

The case of another history book, *Miftah-ul Tawarikh*, which was written by Thomas William Beale is equally interesting. It was first published by the Messenger Press Agra in 1849, and subscribed to by 28 British and 33 Indians. Later, the book was published again by Munshi Nawal Kishore in Kanpur in 1867. The title page mentioned that it was a collection of the most valuable chronograms in the Persian language, showing the exact year and date of the birth, deaths, etc. of Muslims kings, philosophers and their eminent men with historical observations, inscriptions on ancient buildings with other descriptions, from the commencement to 1265 hijri. These were said to be extracted from Persian histories and arranged in chronological order by the author. It was divided into thirteen sections. In the preface (*dibacha*) the author talked about the different kinds of histories –birth and death of Muhammad and ended with the arrival of the British.\(^{479}\)

**Conclusion**

Although most British historians were prejudiced against the medieval period, regarding it as degenerate, oppressive and backward, there were important exceptions to this rule too, the most prominent being the work of Monstuart Elphinstone, who praised the rule of Akbar and Shah Jahan. In their analysis of the past of Bengal, the British interpreted its history in terms of relations between communities made distinct by different, religiously based, civilizations. We can perceive two trends in the publication of Persian historical works. While court chronicles of the Mughal period were published for readers in Britain or for the use of British administrators in India, there was also a trend towards the publication of regional histories. Indeed, as the example of the relationship between the Nawal Kishore Press and the Maharaja of Patiala indicates, the proliferation of regional

\(^{478}\) *Ibid*, p. 98.

\(^{479}\) *Miftah-ul Tawarikh*, Nawal Kishore, 1867. Translation mine.
histories and the growing demand for the publication meant a boost for the proliferation of printing presses.

The English translation of Persian histories undertaken by colonial officials and scholars had important ramifications. Once a Persian text had been translated into English and printed, it underwent a double transformation: from manuscript (often privately owned) to a printed codex (for public distribution), and from a language unintelligible to many British administrators (Persian) to one with which they were most familiar (English). The audience of the work thus expanded in these two very important ways.

The importance or centrality of Persian histories (whether imperial, regional or universal) can be gauged from the deep reliance placed by British historians on them for their own understanding of India's past. The examples are numerous: Dow, Erskine, Elliot and Dowson explored Persian sources for their writings. Stewart also based his History of Bengal mainly on Persian materials; Mill did not know Persian and so wrote his History of India from Persian sources translated into English. Marshman used published English translations of Persian texts in the compilation of his History of Bengal. Hunter also depended for his understanding of the insight into the history of Muslim rule in Bengal on Persian source materials translated for him into English. Elphinstone, Thomas, Wheeler, Keene, Blochmann and Berveridge were all good Persian scholars and used, in addition to Persian sources, coins, inscriptions and archaeological finding for their writings can be fitted with this group. The recent work of Kumkum Chatterjee alerts us to the twin activities of British scholars and historians: translating Persian histories, as well as writing new histories of India based on the already established Persian model. The former indicates a serious engagement of colonial scholars with older models of history writing (as the appreciation heaped on the A'in as a historical source in the preface to its published edition indicates); the latter proves the adage that imitation was indeed, in this context, a form of flattery, however unintended. Colonial scholars were interested in the Mughal past in order to better pose as legitimate successors of the Mughals in India; they were interested in its decline so as to learn 'lessons' from the past, and presumably apply these so as to pre-empt the fall of the