INDO-PERSIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY
OF INDIA DURING THE 1ST HALF OF
THE 18TH CENTURY

ABSTRACT
SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
HISTORY
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UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF
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ALIGARH-202002, (INDIA)

2016
Abstract

Historiography is the science which deals with the study of evaluation of history and the dimensions which it eventually acquired with the passage of time. It also involves the study of the use of various source materials for the construction and reconstruction of history. We also know the information about any particular event is basically linked with broad understanding of these historians and without analysing of this framework an individual piece of information cannot be properly appreciated. In other words no work can be properly understood and correctly utilized unless the motivation of the author are carefully analysed and comprehended. As the whole thinking pattern, scrutiny of approach and response is seen in perspective.

In other words this study of Indo-Persian Historiography of India during the 1st half of the 18th century undertakes the evaluation of history writing of early eighteenth century. With all its controversies and debate this period is one of the richest for its sources. Most of the Persian chronicles are in its manuscript form and have as yet not been fully utilized by scholars. Most of these historical sources are still untapped. They are not translated or edited and are kept as manuscript or rotograph form in different libraries of India and British Museum. The nature of sources is very extensive and it is not possible to cover all available sources in one work. So I have selected only five primary Persian sources which are contemporary to its author in terms of time and place and arranged them in a sequence of its content. As one work deals with one particular ruler and last work Shahnama is selected to know about the socio, political and economic condition of common people from the eyes of a scholar of Hindu community.

In this thesis, I have made a modest attempt to critically analyse the works of five historians’ namely. Tazkirat-us-Salātīn Chaghtā’ī by Muhammad Hādī Khān Kāmwar, Jahāndār Nāma by Nur-ud-Dīn Fāruqī, ‘Ibrat Nāma by Mirza Muhammad bin Mu’tamad Khān, Tārīkh-i-Hindī by Rustam ‘Alī Shāhabādī and Shāhnamā-i-Munawwar Kalām by Shiv Dās Luckhnawi of early eighteenth century. A careful study has been conducted on
the authors’ social and political background, purpose, style, attitude towards sources, methodology, content, biasness, importance and shortcoming of these sources.

The origin of Indo-Persian historiography is always traced from the birth of Islam. The significant aspects of the Arab historians were to introduce the date mark and chronology in their historiography and their wide historical conspectus for the writing of history of an age. By the tenth century the Turks emerged to replace the Arab as a new dominant race. The Persian renaissance with its monarchical spirit and institutions weakened the Arabic tradition and also its wider concept of history. Thus they came to India with the Arabic-Perso tradition of history writing.

Most of the historians of Sultanate period were well placed to observe the events. They had free access to all the sources. Unfortunately they followed the Persian instead of the Arabic model, in which there was greater scope for literary embellishment, didactic approach and subjective element. Independence of judgment, free and frank analysis of the situations, correct appraisal of the personalities, and inquiry into the process and condition of events are indeed rare in these chronicles. The shortcoming of the histories of the period cannot minimise their importance in the area of giving us a wealth of information, particularly in the political field.

A thorough transformation in outlook, in treatment in technique and in theme appears to have taken place in Mughal period. The memoirs introduced by the Timūrīds were contrast to the formal chronicles; they constituted the most original feature of Indo-Persian Historiography. The humanistic aspect of history is more marked and the divine causation also became less prominent in this period than in preceding age. The most significant changes were the secularisation and the widened scope of history. Thus we find the growth of Indo-Persian historiography which developed during the Sultanate period reached its peak in the time of Akbar and sustained during the time of Šāhjâhân and took slightly different turn due to withdrawal of the royal patronage of Aurangzeb in his 11R.Y. In order to justify the cause of his patron Aurangzeb, historians of his reign turned the direction of history in its old form.
By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century a new development took place that was the emergence of many writers of Hindu community who entered the arena of Indo-Persian historiography, they followed same technique as Muslim historians writing in Persian. The importance of these writers lies not only in their looking at the reign through the eyes of contemporary Hindus but staying with close proximity to the great Mughal officers to learn the historical event of the time accurately, but not near enough to the throne to adopt flattery. Generally they have adopted an easy, simple and straightforward style. Another feature is that most of the authors begin in the name of God, the traditional of Muslim way of beginning a work. They convey moral lessons to mankind and often contain hikayat of Quran. Their expressions are in tune with those of Muslims they exhibit full respect to the prevalent Islamic literary and cultural ethos. Most of the historians are not big scholars of Persian and they wrote in plain and unvarnished colloquial Persian.

The historiography of early eighteenth century is the successor of those trends that developed from the Sultanate period and flourished during the Mughals. With passage of six hundred years, it took slightly different turn and emerged with certain its own features. Historians were numerous in numbers and they used the medium of both prose and poetry, but the medium of prose was largely followed. Their reflective styles, description of the conditions of society and characteristic anecdotes saved their work from the dry formality of the court annals. Basically, the information is exhaustive, the scope is comprehensive, and the treatment is lucid and natural. It covers details relating to mainly political but the social and cultural aspect was not ignored by them. It also contains a good account even of the poets, scholars and saints who flourished during the age and gives the glimpse of the intellectual culture of the time. Most of the historians are contemporary to the events and incidents. They either attend imperial court or serve the minister therefore it can be augmented in favour of adequate and authenticity of information about different events collected.
Purpose

The purposes of these historians are to draw parallels from the past and to compare the similar situation facing the Emperors and nobles. They sought to explain the course of history in terms of struggle between the forces of good and evil. Moral lesson derived from the past event are recommended to sovereign and officials. A significant aspect of the approach of these historians is the emphasis on writing of truth. But individual efforts to gain immorality are also not wanting. The other important purpose of their writing was to write ‘Ibrat (lesson) for others and several ‘Ibrat Nāma were written in this period. As can be seen the writers belonged to different walks of life and the bulk of historians were not attached to any court. They were generally commoners who wrote due to different motivations. Generally these writers are munshīs, they belonged to prestigious families of Delhi and other places and had reached a pitiable condition owing to the disturbance of frequent civil war and parties and politics of that time. Being disappointed with their contemporary situation, most of them wanted to write just to pass the time also. Some of them wanted to write their own autobiography and generally they have devoted many pages for their own personal information as well.

Style

They provide conventional political information and narrate the events in the order of succession without linking them into a composite whole. A remarkable feature of the writing is that the local words and proverbs have been freely used. Very often sentences are rhymed and several Arabic quotations of moral reflection are used. A number of works though written in prose have charming poetic flavor. This often provides delightful movements of respite from serious readings and displays the literary exuberance of Arabic and Persian languages. They have made an attempt to exhibit their poetic talent in order to make the book attractive and unique work of art. In general, the historians have attempted to write in simple, plain, colloquial Persian and in straightforward manner. The pagination of the manuscripts like earlier work is based upon the Tark system. The accounts of these works are mostly in the form of running narration although there are some examples of chapterised history as well. Generally they prefer to
write with the heading of *Julūs* Year and *waqāţ*. These historians were not particular about writing separate preface or introduction. Dates are referred in *Hijri* era, and name of months both in *Hijri* as well as Persian is used. From the linguistic point of view one fact deserves to be noted that there are numbers of Hindi words and *duhas* in comparison to earlier. So intermingling of different historical traditions forms a new type of historiography that is simpler, plain, straightforward, lucid, and graphic, in comparison to earlier.

**Content**

Mainly the events of the life of the rulers are described and even these events described are nothing more than account of civil wars, accessions, appointments, promotions, transfers, etc. Their writings are specifically free of religious issues and conviction. These historians confine their treatments of the subject to the narration of what is known as political history. Generally these political chronicles of the period speak about the sad and miserable condition of common people. These historians generally convey to his reader an assessment of contemporary rulers based on general public impression. By and large they emphasised in their work military operations, description of administrative function, the enthronements of ruler, celebration of court festivals, hunting expedition, visiting on shrine, act of generosity etc. The author of this period also delighted in writing chronograms for important dates also. But they fail to ignore the imprint of their superstitious nature in their writing. Generally they mention about good and bad omen and tried to link their content as well.

**Causation**

Unlike, earlier Persian chronicles, events and happening ascribed to divine will become less. Now historical causations have been explained in more or less on personal terms. Despite such tendencies attempt to know the cause of an event is also not totally absent. Generally these historians attribute scarcity of rains and famine, to the execution of any particular personality. At some places, political failures have been ascribed to the wrath of God or fate and no attempt has been made to determine the rational cause as
well. In particular, the rulers’ nature and character is also treated as the major factor for the events of his reign. Generally, most of the information is written as long narrative without antecedents and consequences. Now these historians took courage to criticise the administration openly. But they seem too involved in giving details of incidents to find time to bind their narration in the thread of casual effect relationship.

Sources

The sources of information for them are generally some earlier written historical works. And they largely depended on those literary evidences but they have not taken pains to evaluate the sources. Mostly earlier historians are taken as authorities and have not been questioned. Barring few examples, efforts of corroboration and collation have hardly been attempted. But for contemporary account they try at level best to mention only those accounts which were eyewitness and heard from reliable sources. Generally they based themselves on their own reminiscence and avoid writing hearsay account in their work. Being appointed on the clerical post most of the historians had full access to official documents and they fully utilized it in their writing as well. Largely the contemporary accounts are written on the basis of their own reminiscences and eyewitness details. Largely the sources of information for them are only pen, paper and memory only.

Shortcomings

With the loss of royal patronage these works somehow lost comprehensiveness as serious work of history. It will be almost a misnomer to term some of the earlier standard works. In fact, some of the writers of this period were conscious of the limitation of their works, and do not use the word Tārīkh but rather apply the word ahwāl, ‘ibratnāma, shāhnāma, tazkira, mirāt, waqā‘ī’, etc for their works. They refrain from giving any details about the religious policy of their contemporary rulers and any impact of these policies. Because of the court politics, imperial court was always divided into major groups and the historian were also bound to take the side of any particular group. Just to
take the side of their patron group, they used to omit the important events which had any bad impression on their patron nobles. Just because of individual collection and selection of events an inbuilt subjectivity entered in their writing. So a reader can be cautious and careful in reading these sources. In the struggle of supremacy between the centre and province these historians divided themselves into two groups some display enthusiastic partiality towards the imperial centre while other supported to provincial governors. Only in few cases, where atmosphere filled with faction feuds, historians were constrain to take side and compelled to advocate the cause of their patrons. In the consequence, they used writing as an effective instrument to heighten the interest of one group of nobles at the cost of other.

**Importance**

They were free from any restrictions and were not bound to please their patron rulers and nobles. They have just written contemporary events, based on eyewitness account without any favour for reward and fear of the loss of any post. These historians are fairly independent and write with accuracy. They adhere to chronology, give a fair glimpse of the period and often have the objective of giving advice and warnings. Some of these historians, found no patronage in imperial court and hence they had to migrate to other provinces where they could write about that province as well. Thus there was spurt in regional history as compared to earlier times. Inspite of living in distance provinces these historians had shown their loyalty to imperial court. Enemy of the empire were the same for all these authors and they used very severe words for them. Historical content no longer revolved around rulers and nobles only gradually drifted towards other aspects of society. Although their main focus was to deal political history but the fact related to society which lay scattered in these works, helps us to reconstruct a picture of the social and cultural life of early eighteenth century. Their perspective largely was hemmed in by court and the camp but they introduced comprehensiveness in approach by referring to the account of common people as well. Another the key feature of the historical writing is the work of anonymous author. Several anonymous works are written during this period as well.
Conclusively we can say that during the period the of 1st half of the 18th century with all its turmoil and problems did not tarnish creative talent. Large numbers of works were produced and the men of letter did not allow the quality of their work to deteriorate. Being contemporary and eyewitness of the matters, these writers of all categories have given evidence of being fully alert in their respective fields. They had firsthand knowledge of the events. So it would be unfair to minimize the value of the account of these historians. Without any patronage and banking on their own interest and initiative they have written what they actually felt with more accuracy and avoided giving place to hearsay account. Besides these historical sources several Insha literature, Tazkira and poetical works were also made rapid progress during this period. Thus the diversity and range of the writing of this period is very impressive as compared to other period of Indian history.