CHAPTER NINE

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INDO-PERSIAN HISTORIES (PRE-MUGHUL PERIOD)
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It is unfortunate that British authors, compiling the history of India in the eighteenth century and onwards, accorded little value to the entire historical literature of medieval India and undermined their importance by labelling them 'dull' prejudiced, ignorant and superficial 'fairy-tales', 'fictions' and 'a misnomer to be styled as histories'.

Therefore, Elliot argued that history of India was yet to be written, Of late, Peter Hardy's views on Indo-Muslim histories are rather unsympathetic in conclusions and full of unreasonable criticism.

J. N. Sarkar opines, "any attempt to judge these histories with the yardstick of modern historiography is bound to lead to disappointment and perhaps unreasonable criticism." Some of their characteristics and defects pointed out by him, were also to be found in Christian and medieval historiography of contemporary Europe.

Wrong interpretations have been very much responsible for these misconceptions. It was Professor Habib of Aligarh who for the first time pointed out to the harm done by Sir H. Elliott's wrong interpretations. Major Raverty remarked, "those who not even knowing a letter of any oriental alphabets themselves, have persumed to declare such histories compiled from such incorrect translations, "works of undoubted authority". Major Lees did not coincide in opinion with those

(1) For details See Hasan (ed) Historians, PP. 225-232, Also Grewal: Muslim rule in India, P. 139.
(2) Hardy: Historians of Medieval India.
(3) Sarkar: His of His, P. 65.
(4) Raverty (Tr), Tabaqat: Preface.
who estimated of little worth the large body of historical works. (1) It is indeed, sheer injustice to dismiss them as such. Notwithstanding their short-comings and defects, Indo-Muslim histories are works of high merit. The philosophy of history projected in them and its treatment were quite advance of the age in which these were written. Indo-Muslim authors invoked a new spirit in history-writing in India. (3) One evaluating Indo-Muslim histories should bear in mind that "human history has to be understood. It is necessary to shed off prejudices and one-sided interpretations and to know the ideas of the historians of medieval India". (3) The period of the Sultanate of Delhi was particularly a festile ground for the growth of historical literature and though a large number of books have succumbed to the ravages of time, there is enough material at the disposal of the critical historian to form an impartial, unprejudiced view of history. But to make a proper use of the existing material, "it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the mentality of the men who wrote them." (4) Indo-Persian histories of Pre-Moghul period had following distinctive features.

1. Early medieval Indo-Muslim historiography drew its inspiration from the Persian traditions and had a tell-tale stamp of it. The Turko-Afghan rulers, before settling in India had been completely persianised. They followed Sassanian culture and traditions. Historical works produced

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(1) Article in JRAS of Gt. Britain, & Ireland, 1868, P. 414.
(2) Sarkar: His of His, PP. 135-139.
(3) Sarkar, His of His. Preface, P. XVI
(4) Hasan (ed): Historians, Introduction, P. XI.
under their rule were written in a dynasty-wise arrangement, characteristic of the Persian tradition. The king was the central figure on the historical canvas and history was the narration of his manifold activities. The Muslim Caliph was elected by the people and his power came from the people while the Sassanian monarchs of Persia claimed their divine right to the throne. They were incarnations of God while the Muslim ruler, was only a shadow of God on earth. Hence, remarks Habib, "the Persian historians' imagination reels round the sceptre and the throne." (1) The histories written in India have been projections of the general Muslim historiography growing up outside India in Persia. (2)

2. Historiography attracted the attention of scholars and learned men who cherished and cultivated it as an independent discipline in its own right. They made history revolve round 'great men'. History was considered to be the history of rulers, princes and nobles. The peasants, artisans, and workmen, constituting the major portion of the society, were completely neglected. Their activities were not considered worth-mentioning. Barani goes to the extent of declaring the lower strata of society as not worthy of studying history or deriving lessons from it. (3)

(1) Ahmed, A, Political His and Institutions, Intro, P.7.
(2) Sarkar: His of His, P.35.
(3) Huq, S.M, Comments, "It is interesting to compare Barani's rather narrow conception with Ibn-i-Khalidun's broad view of the science of history. The latter begins his preface with the remarks that men of lower classes are as fond of it as kings and statesmen and his Muqaddimah he describes it as 'the annals and achievements of people of a particular age'. Barani's History of Tughluqs, P.13, f.n.1. For a detailed idea of Ibn Khalidun's concept of history see Rosenthal, (Tr.) Muqaddimah, Vol.1, PP. 15-69.
3. The common belief, that events of history were ordained by Divinity and human beings were mere tools in the hands of God wanted them to carry out what He had pre-ordained, came to the rescue of the medieval historians when they could not explain things or wanted to conceal it on grounds of expediency. They simply attributed history to the Divine will without probing beneath the surface. The tendency of Indo-Muslim historians to explain events as the 'Will of God' was also present in the medieval European historiography. Augustine traces the finger of God in all chaotic events of Rome. His first ten books are devoted to refutation of charges against Christianity. (1)

4. One of the object of Indo-Muslim historiography was to glorify Islam. This attitude led early Indo-Muslim writers to fanciful exaggerations. All sorts of imaginative stories about towers formed of human skulls, rivers flowing out of the blood of infidels (Kuffars), conversion of temples into mosques and demolition of temples and images were invented to prove the ruler 'a champion of Islam'. All military expeditions were styled 'Jihad', even those which were aimed at suppressing the uprisings of rebel muslim nobles. "Religion was the determining basis of thinking of historians and they placed history at the service of religion. The early Indo-Muslim historians accepted the Muslim world order and used history to serve the cause of religion and theology, to glorify Islam, exclusively concentrating

on the deeds of Muslims and regarding the Hindus as passive instruments, as victims of sword, converts, or Jizya payers. They acted as historian of a religious group, not of the whole people". (1)

5. History was used as a lesson to the posterity. Actions were cited which led to disaster and also those which brought success to the doers in this world and hereafter. History was used in the didactic perspective — a store-house of morals'. (2) Hasan Nizami and Barani tried to interpret history and judge it from the religious and ethical viewpoints, facts were twisted in order to fit them in a pre-conceived religious frame.

6. History was chiefly narrative in character. It was regarded as a branch of literature. The historian was not an authority to sift evidence, weigh judgements and give a balanced view, rather he was a practical man, himself at the helm of affairs in most cases. Political and military history were the exclusive subject matter. The main theme of historians during the whole medieval period was politics, and subjects that could be connected with religion, were given great importance. They devoted a fair amount of space in their works to military operations, achievements of the battle-field and colourful activities at the court and hunting places. Descriptions of administrative functions, acts of generosity and patronage of art and literature also absorbed their attention.

(1) Hasan (ed): Historians, P. 194.
(2) Barani, Tarikh, PP.12-13.
7. Almost all medieval historians had a very high idea of history and historiography, and insisted upon truthfulness and honesty as the essential criteria of history writing. Barani goes to the extent of writing that if a historian is not able to write frankly the truth, for fear of reprisal from the ruler, he should employ hints and codes to convey facts. (1) Notwithstanding the high ideals of historiography based on honesty and truthfulness, the historians felt constrained to take sides and advocate the cause of their patrons. This partisan attitude marred their perspective and closed the horizon of their ideas. The canvas of history was narrowed down to a simple discussion of the activities of the ruling monarch, unrelated with the broader aspects of the community life as a whole. In the words of Zahiruddin Malik 'History was reduced to a mere collection of facts to be read like political pamphlets. (2)

There is no doubt that medieval Indo-Persian histories have provided the base for all later historians. Nizamuddin largely borrowed from Minhaj-us-Siraj and Barani. Abul Fazl Badauni and Ferishtah were, in turn, indebted to Nizamuddin. Not only Moghul historians but also British writers, compiling history of India in the eighteenthcentury and onwards based their accounts on these narratives.

(1) Barani, Tarikh, P.16.
(2) Hasan (ed): Historians, P. 149.
In fact, no history of India can be written without the help of Indo-Persian histories compiled in the early medieval period. These are the foundation stones on which future structures are to be built. They are indispensable, for in these pages are recorded the events of a glorious and the vicissitudes of the Muslim rule in India, which brought about an era of change in Indian civilization and culture, its politics and society. It is through these narrations that we are able to have an insight into the minds of the people, engaged in making history some 600 years back, their outlook and the motivating forces behind it. The Indo-Persian histories are of course, open to illustration and rectification by numismatic evidence.