

Indo-Muslim Historiography during the reign of Sultanate of Delhi: Its genesis and major trends

Humera Naz*

Abstract

This article aims to highlight impacts of Muslim rule on origin and development of Indian historiography. The period of the Sultanate of Delhi is significant for origin and introduction of some trends and traditions in Indian historiography for which we have find no records before this era. This essay is fundamentally based upon the literature review which offers an overview of the historical literature concerning different categories in history produced under the royal aegis. Besides the political history, some new aspects in terms of non-political historical literature are also considered on the basis of the *mulfuzat*, *manaqib* and *insha* literature. The paper explores the idea and concept regarding History was not considered as a recognized science ('ilm) either secular or religious in medieval India with a specific object and methodology. In spite, as a subject, it was an elegant art and a noble discipline (*fan-i sharif*). The paper concludes by identifying the major prevailing historiographical trends during this era which were trend setter for the future historians. I anticipate that this endeavor would reveal some extent the true perception about the prevailing traditions and characteristics in Indo-Persian historiography.

Introduction

Unlike China, Greece and Rome, the literature of the ancient Indian history is not extant. Most of the modern scholars hold the view that before the dawn of the modern age, the people of India never had a developed sense for history writing of any value.¹ Rather its accounts seem to be merged in a particular form of religious literature which may not be considered as much authentic. Some historian have an opinion that the people of India did not pay much interest in compiling history writing in a proper manner for the reason of their lack of curiosity about secular affairs, the preponderant influence of fatalist doctrines, absence of a dynamic history, lack of sense of homogeneity, poverty in scientific

* Ms. Humaira Naz, Lecturer, Department of General History, University of Karachi.

¹ D.K. Ganguly, *History and Historians of Ancient India* (New Delhi: Abhino Publishers, 1984), p.4.

outlook and some other factors are said to account for the historical text in ancient India.² While some scholars assert that contrary to the general belief, Indians in ancient times did not neglect the important discipline of historiography. On the contrary, they were good writers of history. Though, ancient India did not produce a Thucydides, but there is considerable evidence to suggest that every important Hindu court maintained archives and genealogies of its rulers.³

Nevertheless, the Indian historiography before the dawn of modern age was by and large literary in character. The study of Indian history was introduced by the foreigners particularly by the Muslims. The Muslim period rightly claims to produce an abundant amount of historical literature on Medieval India. History had always been a discipline of knowledge among the Muslims since they had their own historical traditions from the pre-Islamic era such as *Ayyam al-Arab* (The battle memories of the Arabs), *ansab* (genealogies) and *qasidas* (odes).⁴ They soon developed their own way by using the ancient historiographical traditions of Arabia and Persia. They recorded historical anecdotes with particular emphasis on date and year; a practice quite unknown to other contemporary nations.

The earliest Muslim literature provides an insight of significant evidences of their historical consciousness as well as their sense for scientific treatment in compilation of historical accounts. The origin of historiography during the early-Muslim era is significant as it was perceived from the scriptural writings based on the Holy Quran and the *hadith*. The *Sirah* (biography of the Prophet (S.A.W.W)), the *hadith* (his speeches and actions), and the *maghazis* (material expeditions) are significant as supplanted historical material to the Quranic revelations and as a source for documentation of the early events of Islam. The Muslim historical consciousness was motivated by the development of the science of *hadith*.⁵

In common parlance, the early Muslim historiography refers to the study of the early origins of Muslim religious learning based on a critical analysis, evaluation and examination of authentic primary source material and the organization of these sources into a narrative

² *Ibid.*, p.7.

³ Kader. D. Pathak, *Essentials of History and Historiography* (New Delhi: Swastik Publications, 2012), p.202.

⁴ K.M. Ashraf., *op.cit.*, pp.10-11.

⁵ Muhammad Ghulam Rasul, *The Origin and Development of Muslim Historiography* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1976), p.3.

chronology.⁶ The early Muslim historians developed various methodologies such as the ‘Science of *hadith*’ and ‘*isnad*’ (chain of transmission) in order to evaluate these sources. These methodologies further applied to other historical works and *ilm al-Rijal* (Science of biography) practiced among the Muslims. Modern practice of scientific citation and historical method are greatly in debt to the rigor of *isnad* tradition of the early Muslims.

The Arabs extensively contributed in the origin and growth of early Muslim historiography. Despite the fact that historiography in its true sense developed during the Abbasid period (750-1258 CE), some historical literature had already been produced during the Umayyad reign (661-750 CE). Though, most of this works have survived only in the form of fragment in the classical sources. They brought the Arab history from the pre-Islamic era to their own times in a continuous manner emphasizing on evaluation and authentication of the sources besides internal and external criticism. They used eye-witnesses, oral traditions and official archives (the *diwans*) as their sources.⁷

Though, a non-religious turn to the Muslim historiography was given by Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 CE), a historian of an Arab stock. He is regarded as the father of historiography, cultural history and philosophy of history.⁸ The first detailed studies on the subject of historiography itself and the first critiques on historical methods appeared in his works. He was the foremost who perceived history as a tool for development of social structures and social relationships. He applies his approach of investigation over Arab classical histories. He gave history a new dimension and outlook. He linked up ‘the development of historical politics with economic activities of society’. In the way, Khaldun paved way for the theories like those of Hume, Spencer and Comte.⁹

The Arab or the early Muslim historians are at variance from all others in the unique forms of their compositions. They adopted ‘Narrative style’ for history writing. The Arab historiography was significant and dominant through its chronicles on different themes and subjects such as cities, families, dynasties and some other inconsequential concerns and personalities. They preserved the

⁶ Kader. D. Pathak, *op.cit.*, p.181.

⁷ A.A. Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, (ed. and tr.) Conard Lawrence I (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), p.50.

⁸ Kader. D. Pathak, *op.cit.*, pp.193-94.

⁹ Dr. M.A. Al-Da’mi, *Major Trends of Arab Historiography*, The Quarterly ‘*Historicus*’, J.P.H.S., XLI:2 (July 1993), p.266.

chronological data and had a unique sense of historical laws such as causation and periodicity. Since, they had no precedent in the technical development of historiography, they found some flaws and shortcomings in their work. Undoubtedly, the Arabs established high traditions regarding correctness of authority, compilation of historical data and chronology in the field of historiography.

It is evident that the early Muslim historians were not of all Arab origin. Most of them were the Persians. Though, they were in no way inferior to the native Arab writers, found very little stimulus for their work at home. Generally, they were obliged to apply the specific method handed down by the prevailing Islamic tradition. Only in the later times, when the Persian language and mentality had won their position in literature, Persian historiography was able to certain extent to pursue its own course. Yet, no traces of Arab history writing being influenced by the Persian historiographical trends are to be found in the first two centuries of the Islamic era.¹⁰

The Persian influence significantly increased during the eighth century (the Abbasid period) not only in the political, cultural and literary activities but in the every manner of life. The Persian origin intelligentsia occupied significant status among the historians of the classical period. Their work, in terms of content, may be categorized as the histories of the world or the universal history, monographs; devoted to certain period, dynasty or person and histories of certain countries or cities.¹¹ These histories, like the other narrative types of Persian learned literature, work in simple, strictly objective style of the old Arabic histories. The Persians introduced some new trends to the early Muslim historiography in terms of rise of dynastic, socio-religious and official history and the history of political institutions.¹²

Development of historiographical traditions in India during the Sultanate of Delhi (1206-1526 CE)

The Indian historiography is generally considered a millennium old phenomenon when the Muslim rule was established here. During the early Muslim period, historiography introduced and developed in India with its particular shape and set rules. It was purposely instituted by the Muslims 'as a deliberate form of cultural expression' which was

¹⁰ Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Holland: D. Reidel, 1968), p.238.

¹¹ I.H. Siddiqui, *Indo-Persian Historiography up to the Thirteenth Century* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2010), p.12.

¹² E.G. Brown, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol.I (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p.275.

reinforced from the Arab, Persian and Turkic sources.¹³ The Muslims also settled its normal parameters and premises in order to develop the discipline in an empirical manner. The Muslim rule was the beginning of a new era in Indian historiography, which produced a succession of historical accounts that were according to Professor Dodwell, 'far superior to the English chronicles of the medieval period'.¹⁴ Though, with the earliest arrival of the Muslims in South Asia (8th century CE), we find its detailed record in the *Fath Namah-i-Sindh* (alias *Chach Namah*) which is in sharp contrast to the mythical accounts prevalent among the local people.¹⁵

Besides, the Muslim period is marked with a substantial increase in quantity and improvement in quality of historiography in India. For the reason, whole period of Muslim rule in India is well documented. The historians were attached with the royal courts and were patronized by the rulers. Consequently, a number of historical accounts produced which may be categorized as eulogistic, celebrating the exploits of the monarch and, to some extent, written from the point of view of ruling class. On the other hand, some of the works were compiled with the urge to record the accounts of the people other than the rulers by the poets, scholars and mystics etc. in the form of *tadhkirah*, *malfuz* and *insha* literature.

As mentioned above that the prevailing historiographical trends in India during the Sultanate of Delhi were strongly influenced by the Persian and the Central Asian traditions from where the ruling dynasties and aristocracy migrated.¹⁶ India and Persia particularly share a long history of socio-cultural interchange due to their geographical proximity and political goodwill. The cultural links between them had been renewed with the advent of Islam. Mass departure from Persia to India is not a phenomenon specific to a certain period; the trend does appear to have developed in significance after the establishment of Muslim rule. Persian based elite arose to play important roles at the court of the

¹³ E. Sreedharan, *A Text book of Historiography, 500 B.C. to A.D. 2000* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2004), p.342.

¹⁴ Ref. B. Shaykh. Ali, *History: Its theory and method* (California: Macmillan, 1978), p.78.

¹⁵ Ali b. Hamid bin Abi Bakr al-Kufi, *Fathnamah-i Sindh alias Chachnamah*, Vol. I, Part. I, Persian text edited by Dr. N.A. Baloch (Islamabad: Institute of Islamic History, Culture and Civilization, 1983)

¹⁶ Robert L. Canfield (ed.), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.107.

Sultans of Delhi by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹⁷ Muhammad Yasin writes in this regard that: 'During the early period of Muslim conquest, the Turks and the Afghans were the muscle; whereas the Persians supplied the brain of the ruling aristocracy of India'.¹⁸

The Persians who came and settled in India were many and varied including administrators, officials, scholars, poets, mystics, craftsmen, artisans, artists, and traders. Their refined culture, which was rooted in the Persian language and culture, afforded them certain advantages as they sought patronage in the royal courts of the Sultans of Delhi in northern India, and the Adilshahis and the Qutubshahis in the south. Most of them were munificently welcomed by these courts and attained important posts there. Thus, Persia played a dominant role with India particularly not only in the field of politics and religion but socially in the form of significant cultural objects such as literature, architecture, miniatures, manuscripts, calligraphy, coinage etc.¹⁹ Above and beyond, Persian style of history writing also influenced the pattern of historiography in India. All the contemporary chronicles confirm the continuous presence of the Persians and their ideas at the Indian courts.²⁰

Historians of the Muslim world including India generally followed two major traditions: the Arab tradition and the Persian. Arab historiography included a wide spectrum covering society, institutions, politics and culture, reflecting the history of the whole era. While the Persian historiography only offered the history of the rulers as 'the Persians were the courtly flatterer of their patrons'.²¹ The Arab technique of ascertaining the truth by tracing the event to an eyewitness or the reporter known as the *isnad* or in the other words the Arab critical approach was not strictly followed in India. Other than, the Persian practice came into use depended on authority or the reliable source that passed on the information without any ample criticism of data. Some of the histories generally present the authors' own ideas with the repetition of events. The Arab historiography also provides a picture of every sphere of human society and its entire related phenomenon without

¹⁷ Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.75, 79.

¹⁸ Mohammad Yasin, *A Social History of Islamic India 1605-1748* (Lucknow: D.W. Publishers, 1958), p.5.

¹⁹ Peter Jackson, *op.cit.*, p.179.

²⁰ D. Daniel R. Woolf, *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: 1350-1750*, Vol.III (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.153.

²¹ Tej Ram Sharma, *Historiography: A history of historical writing* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Co., 2005), p.78.

distinguishing between a common people and a ruler which was also absent in Indian Muslim history writing. Despite the traditions of Persian historiography, where the king had always been a centre of attention with all his activities was followed and the life of the public masses was completely neglected. Regardless the missing feature such as enquiry, criticism, sifting of the sources and search for the original source, it portrays certain basic values of the politics and society which determine the outline of the historical literature.

The early medieval Indo-Muslim historiography mainly flourished under the Turko-Persian tradition, which stimulated historical writings in Persian. It was a projection of the overall Muslim historiography evolving beyond India. Dr. Peter Hardy refers to the period of the Sultanate of Delhi (1206-1440 CE) as 'a colonial period in Indo-Muslim historiography-a period when Muslim historians remained aloof within the 'civil lines' of Muslim historical writings'.²² Almost all the Indo-Muslim historians, apart from Isami compiled history covering all imperial aspects including issues and events of political significance under the royal influence. Though, the dynastic periodization was deficient in dates, overlapping of events and involved much repetition. The works of Barani and Isami also suffer from such chronological inaccuracy.

However, the Indo-Muslim historians showed a highly developed taste and natural talent of historiography of their own. This gigantic work has long been served as the main source for the history of medieval India. It emerged in more rational, secular and authoritative form as compared to the mythological, theological and legendary style of ancient Indian historical literature. The early Indo-Muslim historiography abounds in *mathnavis* (poetical expressions), biographies and local and general universal histories.²³ It also influenced the minds of the contemporary scholars like Ziyauddin Barani, Shams Siraj Afif, Minhaj-us-Siraj, Abdul Malik Isami, Yahya bin Ahmad Sirhindi, Amir Khusro, Muhammad Qasim Farishta, Ain al-Mulk Mahru etc., who gave an organized shape to history as an independent discipline. General histories followed the pattern of universal histories in the form of genealogy, chronology of political events, and eulogy of the reigning Sultans, dictums of virtuous rulers besides numerous cosmological, geographical and ethnographical data.

²² P. Hardy, *op.cit.*, p.122.

²³ S.M. Jaffar, *Some Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule in India* (Peshawar: Muhammad Sadiq Khan Publishers, 1950), pp.162-63.

Composition of genealogical table was a major historiographical tradition of that era. The earliest compilation of this kind was entitled the *Shajara-i-ansab-i-Mubarakshahi* by Fakhr-I Mudabbir Mubarak Shah which was presented to Qutub al-Din Aibak in about 1206 CE.²⁴ The main part of the work comprised one hundred and thirty-seven genealogies. It is also religious and didactic in its character. This table was transcribed and kept in the royal library. Regardless of its historical value, it lacks in the critical approach to the sources which had been an integral part since the earliest times of the Muslim historiography as known as the *isnad*.

As we know that most of the historians were the court employees who enjoyed royal patronage, their work revolved round the great men like kings, princes, nobles etc. and gives no detail about the common men. Consequently, compilation of the dynastic history seems to be the most prominent contemporary trend. On the other hand, the general sequence of the historians (except Minhaj's *Tabaqat*)²⁵ is on the whole critical of the Sultans as well as full of denunciation of the world which did not remain stuck where the historians wanted it to. This attribute led them to a biased tendency which colors their narratives. The historiography of this era was extra-Indian in inspiration and methodology and the historians were more or less impressionistic. The main motive behind their work was to get a reward or personal gain. Either they were associated with the court or not, the common values and historiographic premises were the reasons of similarities between these historians like Barani, Minhaj and Sirhindi etc. The distinctive historical moments they witnessed and the variety of their individual lives and temperament resulted in the distinct aspects of their approach to history.²⁶

The historians of the Sultanate period critically examine the activities of the rulers in accordance with the injunctions of Islam as well as their own acknowledgement. Thus, a general statement made with respect to each ruler is to be found in virtually all narratives regarding almost all of the Sultans which prove that he was a good Muslim. However, the other character traits vary from Sultan to Sultan. It is equally unthinkable that a Muslim ruler should not seek to be a good

²⁴ See Muqaddimah of *Shajara-i-ansa* (ed.) Denson Ross, London, 1927.

²⁵ See Minhaj-us-Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, Vol.I (tr.) Maj. H.G. Raverty, Lahore, 1975.

²⁶ Dr. Khurram Qadir, 'Medieval Historiography of Muslim India: The Sultanate Period', *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, L:3 (July-Sep. 2002), p.26.

Muslim though Alauddin Khalji did consider the possibility of founding a new religion.

Although, the historians of early medieval India including Minhaj benefited from the reliable sources, eye-witness accounts, but their work is mostly deficient in criticism and assessment of the sources and includes some unauthentic accounts. The work of Minhaj is so extensive in its scope that it covers more than twenty Muslim dynasties across the world. Despite of this shortcoming, it is considered a very important and authentic source regarding the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century CE, as well as the accounts of the Ghaznavids, the Ghorids and Slave dynasty for author was eye-witness.

The historians introduced eulogistic histories including *Manaqib* (stages) and *Fada'il* (blessed). As a general rule, the authors started their narration with a statement in praise of God, occasionally a *hamd* in verse followed by praise of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W) in prose or a *na'at* in verse. Then they acknowledged debts of gratitude and words of praise and reverence for those whom the author honored. Mostly this included sultans, *umara*, *ulama* and *sufiah*, some of whom were also recipients of the dedication of the work. In the introductory remarks or in the preface, the author usually stated the aims and objectives of his compilation particularly. The prose eulogies called *manaqib* is a form of highly refined literature concerning to a ruler, a noble, a saint or a learned man. Utbi's *Tarikh-i-Yamini* is considered as the first attempt in this regard which was composed in praise of Mahmud of Ghazna and his father Subaktigin.²⁷ Later, some historians in India also followed this style of narration.

An outstanding historian of the Sultanate period considered first in this regard is Shams Siraj Afif. His father Shams-i Afif held various important offices under Sultan Firuz Shah. Afif produced a number of worthy books in eulogistic form such as *Manaqib-i Ala'i*, *Munaqib-i Sultan*, *Ghiyas al-Din Tughlaq Shah*, *Manaqib-i Sultan Muhammad*, *Dhikr-i-Kharab-i-Delhi* and *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi*. The first three works deal with the periods of Alla al-Din Khalji, Ghiyas al-Din Tughlaq and Muhammad bin Thughlaq respectively. The fourth one reproduces the accounts of Timur's sack of Delhi.

However, these four works are not extant and the *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* is the only and the most important work produced by Shams Siraj Afif. He composed this book in the first decade of the fifteenth century and attributed to Sultan Firuz Shah. It provides a very well

²⁷ Abu Nasar al-Utbi, *Tarikh-i-Yamini* (eds.) Ali and Sprenger, Delhi, 1847; See also Elliot and Dowson, Vol.II, Allahabad, 1978.

supplement to Barani's *Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi*. Rather, it provides a reflection of the socio-cultural and religious life of the common masses.²⁸ Though, this work also suffers with some defects including religious prejudices and exaggeration about his patron's achievements, but its historical value and authenticity cannot be undermined.

Didactic aspect of history was another new feature introduced in the early Indo-Muslim historiography. Compilation of poems as *Qasida* in praise of Sultan is considered as the most interesting and forceful form of history of the Sultanate period. It's main purpose was to educate the Sultans in their duties through the historian's philosophy. Badr al-Din alias Badre Chach (d. 1346 CE), a courtier of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq composed the *Shah Namah* that contains 30000 verses, sheds light on the social and cultural life of the era of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq besides the account of his leading campaigns.²⁹ The author gives valuable information in order to confirm accurate dates of some important events. But as far as its authenticity is concerned, this book is not much worth for historical value. It represents a very good example of Turkish influence on Persian literature.³⁰

As these historians were mostly well-versed in many subjects as theology, philosophy and jurisprudence, their intellectual capacity was not narrow. Consequently, they were concerned in drawing conclusions from events of the past in order to make rulers aware of the law of nature or the logic of history. The historians performed not only their duties as narrators of events but also philosophers, teachers and guides to the rulers as well as the community. The most illustrious example of such kind of historian is Diya al-Din Barani (d. 1359 CE). Amongst eight compilations which are on his credit, most of them are not traceable. Two of his most remarkable works are the *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi* and *Fatawa-i Jahandari*.

Barani dwells on the uses of history, its methods of writing and its place in the discipline of knowledge. He also gives references of a good historian in introductory chapter of the *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi*. This book was completed in 1357 CE, comprising information about the period of Balban till the sixth regal year of Firoz Shah to whom this work is dedicated. In order to comprehend its contents, it is indispensable

²⁸ See Shams Siraj Afif, *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* (ed.) Wilayat Hussain, Calcutta, 1862.

²⁹ Anil Chandra Banerji, *The State and Society in Northern India, 1206-1526*, K.P. Bagchi, 1982; Bhanwarlal Nathuram Lunia, *Life and Culture in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Kamal Prakashan, 1978), p.72.

³⁰ E.G. Brown, Vol.III, *op.cit.*, p.110.

to have ability to understand the expressions, connotations and terminologies that Barani incorporated in text. According to N.K. Singh: 'Barani is one of those *historians* who refuse to enlighten a reader unless he has thoroughly familiarizes himself with the basic categories of his thought and the chief *characteristics* of his personality'.³¹ However, this worthy work lacks in the sequence of the events of the period of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Barani himself confessed the shortcoming of his work as he writes, 'I have written in this history the principles of Sultan Muhammad's administration and have paid no heed to the sequence and order of events'.³²

Another compilation of Barani, *Fatawa-i Jahandari* also subscribes a genre of historical literature, as provides an analysis of the qualities, virtues and talents that a good monarch should possess. He also states the principles of administration and ideals of government with elaboration by the precedence from the history of Iran and other Muslim countries. The author gives detail about the Sultans, their courts, policies and the contemporary conditions. This account is also significant and valuable in order to bring an idea about the socio-economic conditions of the people of the era.³³ Despite, the main purpose of the author was to express the virtues of his patron Sultan Firuz Shah and both of the biographies are flawed for their unrealistic traits of a ruler's character, as Peter Hardy says, 'a tailor's dummy garbed in ideal attributes'.³⁴

Compilation of artistic history in the form of poetic and literary artifice was another emerging historiographic trend of this era. Some of the historical compositions of this period, in a way conform to the style of Livy and Tacitus whose main purpose of writing history was to thrill and amuse, and to instruct and refresh the readers by adopting an exceedingly polished style. In spite of the more prosaic and straightforward text of Sirhindi and Afif, the historians of this period did not consider historiography to be a non-literary activity. They created an image that they wished for making use of exaggerated statements, for instance the story of the depopulation of Delhi during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq.³⁵ The proverbial and poetic style appealed to their sense of portrayal and depiction. These accounts may not be

³¹ N.K. Singh, *op.cit.*, p.184.

³² Diya al-Din Barani, *Tarikh-i Firozshahi* (Urdu tr.) Dr. S. Moin al-Haq (Lahore: Urdu Science Board, 1991)

³³ See Diya al-Din Barani, *Fatawa-i Jahandari* (Urdu tr.) Prof. Atiq Ahmad (Islamabad: NIHCR, 2004).

³⁴ P. Hardy, *op.cit.*

³⁵ Yahya bin Ahmad Sirhindi, *Tarikh-i-Mubarakshahi* (Urdu tr.) Dr. Aftab Asghar, Lahore, 1986, p.186.

considered as literal or factual rather dramatized the monumental events designed to bring alive in the mind of the reader. Thus, these statements are considered partly journalistic and partly historical.

History was also considered as an essential fragment of such scheme of studies of the elite like the princes, nobles etc. As a result, historians had an honored status in the royal court besides the *ulema* and the poet for the reason to provide a form of literature which was highly panegyric in exceedingly polished style. *Taj al-Ma'athir* of Hassan Nizami is considered as the first attempt in this regard that 'in the style or narration is singular; meager on meanings and intricate on artistic prose... it is an example of a deficiency in history but fertility in elaborate and stylized language. This is why historians have ignored it'.³⁶ This composition of Nizami is also considered as the first official history of the Sultanate period which focuses upon the political events from 1192 to 1228 CE. *Taj al-Ma'athir* is in fact considered partly history and partly fiction. The author uses both Arabic and Persian languages, and prose and poetry style side by side as his medium of expression.³⁷

The next from such historical genre is Amir Khusro's work. Though, Khusro is primarily regarded as a poet but significantly contributed to the medieval historiography. Khusro enjoyed the patronage of almost all the Khalji sultans. Due to proximity to them, he found ample opportunities to witness the political events of the age quite thoroughly. For this reason, his literary work including *mathnavis* and *diwans* shed light on the historical events of the era. Among almost ninety-two compilations, most of his work has been lost and only a few important works are available to us.³⁸ The most noteworthy historical compilations of Amir Khusro is *Qiran-us-Sa'dain* which was composed in 1289 CE. This book deals with the memorable event of the meeting of Bughra Khan, the governor of Bengal and his son Mu'iz al-Din Kaiqubad, the Sultan of Delhi. It not only provides a picture of the character of Bughra Khan but also depicts the socio-political and cultural conditions prevailing at the time.³⁹

³⁶ S. M. Waseem (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.28.

³⁷ Jaswant Lal Mehta, *Advanced Study in the Study of Medieval India*, Vol.I (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2009) reprint, p.7; Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1983).

³⁸ Abu al-Qasim M. Ferishta, *Tarikh-i-Ferishta* (Urdu tr.) Abdul Hai Khawaja (Lahore: Book Talk, 1991), p.232.

³⁹ *The Gazetteer of India: History and Culture*, Vol.2, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1973, p.459.

In the *Miftah al-Futuh*, which he composed in 1291 CE, Khusro provides a detailed account of military campaigns of Sultan Jalal al-Din Khalji during his first regal year. Another poetical work entitled *Ashiq* composed in 1316 CE, Khusro presents an account of the love affair and marriage of Prince Khizr Khan and Dewal Devi (daughter of Raja Karan of Gujrat). In *Nuh Sipahr* composed in 1319 CE, Khusro provides a descriptive and authentic record of the social, philosophical and cultural conditions of India at the time. It also deals with the Military achievements of Sultan Mubarak Shah.⁴⁰ In the *Tughlaq Namah*, composed during the last year of Khusro's life, he gives the accounts of the events leading to the accession of Sultan Ghiyas al-Din Tughlaq, his victory over Khusro Shah and a few other events of the early years of Tughlaq's reign.

Then comes another leading work of Khusro, entitled the '*Khaza'in al-Futuh*' (The Treasure of Victories) or *Tarikh-i-Ala'i* composed in 1311 CE. This work is considered as the most valuable and authentic record of the first sixteen years of Ala al-Din Khalji's reign. It also provides a detailed account of the Deccan campaign of Malik Kafur besides Ala al-Din Khalji's military expeditions and conquests of Gujrat, Chittor and Malwa.⁴¹ This is considered as an official account because it was recorded at the royal instance.

Khwaja Abdul Malik Isami also wrote a historical epic entitled the *Futuh-us-Salatin* that sheds light on the deeds of the Muslims in India from the time of Mahmud of Ghazna till the date of its compilation in 1350 CE. This composition is composed on the pattern of Firdausi's *Shahnameh* that consists of almost 12000 verses.⁴² It basically consists of the stories, legends, anecdotes and the oral testimonies gathered from the author's friends and associates besides some eye-witness evidences. It unfolds some hidden truth such as some facts about the Ala al-din's Deccan campaign in 1296 CE or the Mongol invasions of India during the Khalji period.⁴³ The author's main interest was the war events and he made no attempt to provide any detailed account about the economic and administrative policy of Ala al-Din Khalji. His testimony for Muhammad

⁴⁰ Waheed Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amir Khusrau* (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 1962), p.148.

⁴¹ See Amir Khusru, *Khazain-ul-Futuh* (Aligarh: Allahabad University Press, 1927).

⁴² Salma Ahmed Farooqui, *op.cit.*, p.8.

⁴³ P. Hardy, *op.cit.*, p.103.

b. Tughlaq's complicity in his father's murder also seems to be a myth. Isami had fabricated a story out of the event.⁴⁴

However, the accounts related to the atrocities and cruelty of Muhammad bin Tughlaq during shifting of capital to Daulatabad shows biases and exaggerations of the author. For the reason that Isami seems to be free from any fear of the Tughlaq Sultans, he enjoys a unique position among all other historians of the time. On the other hand, he himself was criticized for his biases against the Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq because he himself along with his family suffered at Sultan's hands. In spite of all these issues, the value and importance of his work cannot be diminished. N. K. Singh opines on this matter as, 'Isami has written his historical work in short and swift verse. He indulged neither in the rhetoric of Amir Khusro, nor in the abstruseness of Badre Chach, but writes in lucid graphic and simple style. But he has his own shortcomings and defects'.⁴⁵ However, the *Fatuh-us-Salatin* may not be worthy as an authority or source for political events but its significance as an account for cultural history cannot be disregarded.

Apart from many other features of writing history, a new outstanding innovation in the field of medieval historiography of India is known as the *insha* or the official letter writing as a source of history. Governor of Multan, Malik-us-Sharq, Ain al-Mulk Mahru compiled the *Insha-i-Mahru* (a work of epistolography), a collection of 123 letters as official documents drafted by the author for the Tughlaq sultans and other officials is considered as the earliest source compiled in this regard. These letters are very authentic and useful source of information about the period of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firuz Shah Tughlaq.⁴⁶ This work is worthy as a sole authority for the military expeditions of Firuz Shah to Lakhnoti and Thatta. It also gives us detailed information about the machinery of statecraft under the Tughlaq Sultans and elaborates the prevailing social, political and religious conditions of the time.

Besides traditional categories, one may come across with some new genres formulated in Indo-Persian literature produced during the period of Sultanate of Delhi. Besides the translation into Persian of Arabic and Sanskrit classics, a pioneering effort in terms of *Sufi Malfuzat* (collection of discourses or utterances) captures the attention of the

⁴⁴ See Isami, *Futuh-us-Salatin* (ed. and Eng. tr.) Agha Mahdi Husain, 3 Vols., Aligarh, 1967-77.

⁴⁵ N.K. Singh, *op.cit.*, p.465.

⁴⁶ Bhanwarlal Nathuram Lunia, *Some Historians of Medieval India* (New Delhi: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, 1969), p.99.

contemporary historians. This literature possessed historical significance as it portrays a picture of socio-cultural, religious and economic conditions of the common people for that we find no other source of information. This new genre inspired Persian writers in other Persian speaking countries also. This new kind of historical literature commenced with the compilation of *Fawa'id al-Fuad* by Mir Hassan Sijzi, the disciple of Shykh Nizam al-Din Chishti (Auliya).⁴⁷ Next to him was Hamid Qalandar who noted down the utterances of Shykh Nasir al-Din Chiragh Dehlvi and gave title to his work as *Khair al-Majalis* (Auspicious Assemblies).⁴⁸ *Siyar al-Auliya* of Mir Khurd provides revealing remarks about the various projects of Sultan Mohammad bin Tughlaq.⁴⁹ However, this sort of literature is a category itself that is idiosyncratic from all other type of literature in its spirit, methodology and literary treatment.

At the time, when a number of historians were compiling history of North India, some of the writers were compiling the history of some regional ruling dynasties of the South. The rulers of the regional dynasties also continued to follow the same trends of writing history. These rulers patronized and nurtured the production of fine historical compilations in the Persian style, and assembled large collection of books from many other parts of the Turko-Persian world on the subject of history in Arabic and Persian. Most of these historians migrated from the other parts of India, Iran and Central Asia and settled here under the royal patronage.

As in Kashmir the '*Raj Tiringni*' of Kalhana had already set up precedence for the coming historians that was still surviving. Kashmir was the only region in India that possessed historical traditions before the commencement of the Muslim rule. However, after two hundred years of '*Raj Tiringni*', Junaraj compiled an account of the events till the period of Sultan Zain ul Aabdin and gave it the same title. In 1459 CE, after the death of Junaraj, Shriver, one of his pupil composed the contemporary history covering the events till 1486 CE. Parajiya Bhat carried on the work and wrote '*Rajiya Woopstak*', a chronicle covered the events from 1517 to 1596 CE.⁵⁰ This chronicle is considered as the last attempt made in this regard in Sanskrit, though Persian language and literature had

⁴⁷ See Mir Hassan Sijzi, *Fawa'id al-Fuad* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1996).

⁴⁸ See Hamid Qalandar, *Khair al-Majalis* (ed.) K.A. Nizami, Aligarh, 1959.

⁴⁹ See Mir Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliya* (Delhi: Muhibb-i-Hind Press, 1885).

⁵⁰ Mohibb al-Hasan, *Historians of Medieval India* (Urdu tr.) Masroor Hashmi (Delhi: Urdu Promotion Burue, 1985), p.107.

been flourished from the period of Zain ul Aabdin (1420-70 CE) during which Persian progressively replaced Sanskrit.

As follows, tradition of history writing soon cultivated in Persian, and two of the compilations were written by the court poets Mulla Ahmad and Mulla Nadri. Unfortunately, these works have perished and do not exist anymore. Besides Qazi Ibrahim and Mulla Hassan Qadri wrote chronicles during the second period of Sultan Fateh Shah (1493-1505 CE) and the Chack rulers (1566-88 CE) respectively that also had long been lost. The only existing book from the pre-Mughal era is Syed Ali's '*Tareekh-i-Kashmir*' which was written during the period of Yousuf Shah.⁵¹

In the south, Sayyid Ali bin Aziz Allah Tabataba migrated from Iraq in 1550 CE and first spent his services in the court of Sultan of Golkonda and later joint Burhan Nizam Shah II of Ahmadnagar where he undertook to compile the *Burhan-i-Ma'asir*.⁵² This book was completed in 1596 CE and gives us an authentic and detailed account of the history of the Bahmani dynasty. Tabataba extensively benefitted from Isami's work the *Fatuh-us-Salat* for the history of the period of Ala al-Din Hassan, the first Bahmani ruler.⁵³ This book also provides some records regarding the sultans of Gulbarga and Bidar besides the Nizamshahi dynasty of Ahmadnagar. However, the work suffers from some defects due to praise for the author's patron but this seems a normal feature in the medieval Muslim historiography.

Another historian of the south was Abd al-Razzak, who came from Herat entered the court of Raya wrote a noteworthy account of the state of Vijayanagar in his book entitled the *Matla us-Sa'adain wa Majma al-Bahrain* (Arising of the Two Fortunate Stars and Meeting of the Two Seas).⁵⁴ However, this book basically provides the history of Central Asian dynasties besides some portions related to the accounts of Trans-Indus regions from 1335 to 1468 CE.⁵⁵

The main characteristics of early Indo-Muslim historiography

The most important objective of the historiography of this era was to characterize the past as a succession of events, conduct, activities and affairs of the rulers, description of wars, battles, campaigns and court

⁵¹ Mohibb al-Hasan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, *ibid.*, p.1.

⁵² Mohibb al-Hasan, *Historians of Medieval India*, *ibid.*, p.156.

⁵³ N.K. Singh, *op.cit.*, p.951.

⁵⁴ Mohibb al-Hasan, *Historians of Medieval India*, *op.cit.*, p.155.

⁵⁵ Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Holland: D. Reidel, 1968), pp.444-45.

with less effort of investigation and examination the causes and consequences of any historical process. However, some of the main features characterized in this work are as under:

The element of divinity also reflects from the works which is a predominately character from the early phase of the Muslim historiography. God is seen as working through individuals, not through classes, social forces or the spirit of the age. This significant feature of the historiography of the era was based on the conviction that there was a Divine dominance of the historical process.⁵⁶ This sort of philosophy is near to the Church transcendentalism and Hindu fatalism, and hence it did not believe in action resulting in reaction, nor that do the two together generate the seed of history.

In this way, the historiography of this period shows an inclination towards the providential theory. The work, to some extent lacks in authenticity of the sources and limitation of accuracy was normally expressed in the term 'and God knows the truth of the matter'.⁵⁷ It assumes the concept that all the actions are performed due to Divine will and not for the reason of any reaction, antithesis, or impact of any other event on them. According to this conception, the principal function of governance was the fulfillment of the Divine covenant which dictated the terms of the ruler's contract with God. It was also a tool to glorify the Muslim rule in the world. Fundamentally the Sultanate of Delhi was a theocracy in which the Sultans were endowed with both the powers: religious and temporal. Most of the Sultans considered themselves to be the deputies of the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad and received investitures from them. They nominally acknowledged overlord ship of the Caliph.⁵⁸ They asserted to enforce the tenets of the Quran and Muslim canon law. For the reason history, which was more or less official, to a great extent became theocratic not humanist, as purposeful and direct, but not interrelated and progressive.

One more noteworthy contribution of the Muslims to the Indian historiography was in terms of chronology, which particularly denotes *Hijra* dates, all fixed and determined. As it has been mentioned earlier that Hadrat Umar (R.A) the second pious caliph introduced a lunar *hijri*

⁵⁶ Peter Jackson, *op.cit.*, p.59.

⁵⁷ Minhaj-us-Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* (Urdu tr.), Vol.I, Ghulam Rasul Mehr, Lahore, 1985, p.391.

⁵⁸ M. Tariq Awan, *History of India and Pakistan*, Vol.1 (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1994), p.499.

calendar for the Muslims. Adoption of a single standardized calendar through the whole Muslim world kept them away from any confusion of chronology which was a prevailing defect particularly in the ancient Indian and Christian chronology. It was a great step forward in Indian historiography.

However, the contemporary accounts have some shortcomings and flaws in terms of correct chronology of the events due to certain limitations and constraints that the writers had to face, but their efforts are worthy of appreciation. All these historical accounts on the whole complement each other and provide a fairly realistic account of the pre-Mughal period. Since, a general defect in the matter of chronology is that, they all are not very dependable. Two of them, Minhaj and Barani, are quite careless in their treatment of dates while Sirhindi, is not very accurate in some important cases, he is less casual than the others. He gives the dates of events along with the year.⁵⁹ The reason may be that as Barani claims to the contrary neither he nor Minhaj were historians by profession. They relied on memory for the narration of events. Thus, they failed to recollect the names of several individuals.

Even though, history had become a professionalized subject in the hands of secular scholars, who were under the royal patronage, there was another form of literature in which it was treated by the *ulema* (the scholars) and the *sufis* (the mystics). This sort of historical literature is supportive for the records of socio-religious movements and development of thoughts. Their letters, the metaphysical and ethical writings and records of their speeches and views (termed as *malfuzat*) are a great source of intellectual history of the era. In this literature, we find three basic components termed as pure history, pure fiction and pure ethics. A great work, '*Khair al-Majalis*' of Hamid Qalandar presents a good example of such a literature in which the author compiled the conversations or *majlis* of Shaykh Nasir al-Din Chiragh Dehlavi.⁶⁰ It also sheds light on the character of famous contemporary personalities as Miinhaj-us-Siraj, the author of the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* and the socio-political and economic conditions during the period of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Such books are worthy for reconstructing the social and economic life of the Muslims in India and their contribution to the Indian culture. Most of the work of Afif also abounds with religious and moral percepts.

⁵⁹ Ishwari Prasad, *History of the Qaraunah Turks in India*, Vol.I, Allahabad, 1936, p.201.

⁶⁰ N. Hanif, *Biographical encyclopedia of Sufis: South Asia* (New Delhi: Sarup and sons, 2000), p.277.

As the *ulema* (the scholars) and the *sufiyah* (the mystics) who played a very important role in the socio-cultural setup under the Sultanate of Delhi, were mainly inspired from the Iranian and Turkish (Central Asian) traditions. This tendency resulted in the need for the sultans to seek endorsement and verification of their deeds from the *ulema*.⁶¹ Thus, the rulers sought their ideals of governance from the *ulema* on the one hand and the best practices of Iranian, Greek and Turkish norms as well as the *Khulafa-i-Rashidin* on the other.⁶² The historians of the Sultanate, therefore, critically evaluated the activities of the rulers in the light of the dictates of religion and the best practices. They also conformed to the social concept of *murawwat* and the religious norm of joining *ihsan* with '*adl*'.⁶³ In this regard, history was regarded as the main source to impart moral education.

Thus, generally we find that they would not normally criticize any personality entire in the analysis traits of character but would rather confine themselves to any positive statements which could be attributed to the person. On general statement made with respect to each ruler is to be found in virtually all narratives regarding almost all of the sultans. This relates to the endorsement that he was a good Muslim, but other character traits vary from sultan to sultan. Besides deliberating the concept of not criticizing individuals and personalities directly, but not of critically evaluating action, was the practice of identifying the strength of personal beliefs and stating the obligation of the author.

Generally, the historians of the period did not consider historiography as a non-literary activity. They portrayed and depicted the events in a proverbial and poetic style and for this purpose they used exaggerated statements for instance the story of depopulation of Delhi during the reign of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq. The reason behind such dramatic expression was to bring it alive in the mind of the reader. Consequently, the statement was partly journalistic and partly historical when viewed in the modern sense of the terms. Since one of the objectives of historiography was journalist, there being no newspapers etc., victories of the Muslims were considered newsworthy by them just like the other nations. Historiography during the Sultanate period was bound within the concepts as the object of governance and the position of the rulers and the subjects in the scheme of society generally and life particularly.

⁶¹ *Fiqh, Hadith* and *Fatwas* being the three main forms in this regard.

⁶² See Ghazali, *Nishat-ul-Muluk* (tr.) F.R.C. Bagley London, 1962; Nizam-ul-Mulk Tusi, *Siyasat namah* (tr.) Herbert Darke, London, 1960.

⁶³ Ishwari Prasad, *op.cit.*, p.206.

As most of the historians were under the royal patronage and they were assigned for this task to compile glorious deeds of their patrons. For this reason, their subservience to their benefactor sultan expresses it reflects in their compilations in terms of another trait of the contemporary historical literature.

The object of writing history was, mainly concerned with the awareness of history among the aristocracy and arbiters of the Divine will and as a result, and indirectly, with the journalistic objective of keeping the populace informed of the state's developments and progress in the recent past. The historians were well aware of the socio-political structure and based their value judgment and analysis on them. Another trend in contemporary historiography was to maintain an effort in order to inform the sultan, the *ulema* and the *umara* the actions of the past rulers and their consequences so that they could plan their actions and historical role in that light.

Besides, another purpose was to make public the achievements and failures of the historical personalities as an acknowledgement of their good and noteworthy deeds. On this basis, the people could admire, recognize and acknowledge benefactors and scorn and identify their oppressors in light of the judgment of history as identified by the historians.⁶⁴ So, there were two major objectives of writing history: first that the analysis of history would broaden the vision of the sultan and second that people would get to know the deeds of people who brought the riches of the world to their own people.

Conclusion

It is evident that the historians employed by the Muslim rulers, could not freely express their views and opinion regarding the actual prevailing conditions and were expected to record what their masters desired them to write or what pleased them. They were expected to glorify the achievements of their masters in all the fields of their activities. Thus, despite of writing what they felt, observed and experienced themselves, they suppressed and distorted the facts, which, in their views, could displease their patrons and prove to be harmful to them. Willingly or unwillingly they tried their best to present their masters as the most benevolent, kind-hearted, broad-minded, pious followers of the religious doctrines and defenders of the faith of Islam. The nature of the assignments made the official or court historians more interested in the events of the courts than the lives of the common people. They confined their works to the details of the military and administrative achievements

⁶⁴ Minhaj-us-Siraj, *op.cit.*, p.51.

of the rulers. They did not rather mention the sufferings of the common people because this might negate the eulogistic remarks which they used to make about their patron ruler. So, very rarely did they make any reference to the general life and conditions of the lower classes of the people. Rather the *malfuzat* literature provides information in this regard.

Undoubtedly, the tradition of factual narration and of court histories was introduced by the Sultans of Delhi, yet it came into its full pace under the Mughals. During the Sultanate period, a substantial number of histories were compiled because of which, for the entire period we do not face any difficulty in sequence of events compared to the pre-Muslim period. However, the history nominally existed but did not go beyond the standpoint of ruling class. Such tendency kept history in restrictions for quite a period. The Muslim period witnessed an admirable standard of historiography in Persian that widened the perimeters of Persian historiography in India particularly. In order to maximize and enhance the glory of the Muslim rule, the Sultans of Delhi encouraged the compilation of the histories by employing the official court historians. They tried to provide literary refinement to history writing which substantially adds to our knowledge of the past or to its criticism. Dr. Gulfishan Khan opines in this regard that ‘...however, the Muslim rule was a period of development of learning and scholarly activities but History was not considered as a recognized science (*‘ilm*) either secular or religious in medieval India with a specific object and methodology. In spite, as a subject, it was an elegant art and a noble discipline (*fan-i sharif*)’.⁶⁵

However, the Indo-Muslim historiography under the Sultanate of Delhi introduced some new experiments and traditions that eliminated the long subsisting lacuna in the intellectual life of India. These historians used both of the mediums of expression of prose and verse for compiling historical record. Most of them adopted Persian model of ‘greater scope for literary embellishments, didactic approach and subjective element’.⁶⁶ As historiography turned into a specialized field, a professional environment developed in which the less talented left behind and the competent professionals improved techniques to the level that till the Mughal period, most of the deficiencies were eliminated.

⁶⁵ Dr. Gulfishan Khan, ‘New Trends in Indo-Persian Historiography during the Eighteenth Century’, *The Quarterly Historicus*, Journal of Pakistan Historical Society, LVIII:3 & 4 (July-December 2010), p.55.

⁶⁶ B. Shaykh Ali, *op.cit.*, p.386.