

Muslim Historiography in South Asia

The historiographical tradition among the Muslims goes back to the seventh and eighth centuries when the composition of the Sirah (biography of the Prophet Muhammad [PBUH]) and Maghazi (military history of the times of the Prophet Muhammad [PBUH]) works began. Later, the Muslim historians borrowed the principles of historical criticism from the process of compilation of hadith literature. Therefore, the Muslims had a better sense of history and chronology, and were more cautious about historical criticism as compared to the Hindus in ancient India. Historiography was further developed by the Muslims in India after the establishment of Muslim rule.

Muslim Historians of the Pre-Sultanate and Sultanate Period

Before and during the era of the Delhi Sultanate, a number of works having historical worth and value were produced. However, their authors were generally associated with the court, and held high positions in the Sultanate of Delhi. Therefore, many of these works were written to please and win the favors of the rulers and the Sultans of Delhi. Moreover, they were generally dedicated to the various Sultans, who were the patrons of their authors. For example, Minhaj (the author of Tabaqat-i Nasiri), Barani

(the author of Tarikh-i Firuzshahi) and Afif (the author of Tarikh-i Firuzshahi) were closely associated with various regimes in the Sultanate of Delhi. These works have been written in Persian, which was the official language of the court of Delhi. The focus of these works was political and military history of the Sultanate. These works deal with the views and policies of the Delhi Sultans, and discuss the role of political actors such as the Sultans, their nobles, confidants, and influential high state officials. Therefore, they present a statist or elitist discourse. These works serve as an official source on the history of the Sultanate era. The important among them include the following: -

Juzjani: the Author of Tabaqat-i Nasiri

Qazi Minhaj al-Siraj Juzjani authored Tabaqat-i Nasiri in 1256 during the reign of Sultan Nasir al-Din Mahmud (r. 1246-66). At that time, he was the chief Qazi (judge) of Delhi, The book was dedicated to the reigning Sultan, and that was why it is named after him. It is a dynastic history that covers the political history of more than twenty dynasties of Muslim rulers who ruled different areas before the Mongol invasions in the mid-thirteenth century. For a student of Indian history, it is an important source on the history of the Ghaznavids, Ghaurids and the early Turkish Sultans of Delhi.

Zia al-Din Barani; the Author of Tarikh-i Firuzshahi

Zia al-Din Barani (b. 1285-d. 1360), the author of *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi*, was a renowned fourteenth-century political theorist and historian. He belonged to an aristocratic family, which had served the Ilbaris (the early Turkish Sultans of Delhi), the Khaljis and the Tughluqs. He himself remained a courtier of Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq (r. 1325-5)) for nearly seventeen years. *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* was composed in 1359 during the reign of Sultan Firuz Tughluq (r. 1351-88), to whom it was dedicated as well. It covers the political history of the Sultanate era beginning from Sultan Balban's reign, i.e. 1266, till the initial years of the reign of Sultan Firuz Tughluq. It was composed in 1359. Barani saw a didactic purpose in history-writing, and believed that people could learn lessons from the past. Moreover, he argued that the study of history increases one's consciousness as well as improves one's judgment about people and events. Barani's other important work is *Fatawa-i Jahandari* (Rules of the Government), which deals with political thought.

Amir Khusrau; the Author of *Ahazai in al-Futuh*

Amir Khusrau (d. 1325) composed *Ahazai in al-Futuh* in 1311, which is an official history of the military campaigns of Sultan Ala al-Din Khalji (r. 1296-1316). It highlights the military successes of the Sultan, while ignoring the defeats the Sultanate's army had to suffer in the battlefields. It must be remembered that Amir Khusrau was a court poet of Sultan Ala

al-Din Khalji, and one cannot expect an objective account from him. Amir Khusrau composed other works of historical value as well such as Qiran al-Sa adayn (composed in 1285) about the meeting of Sultan Kaiqubad and his father, Bughra Khan in Oudh, and Miftah al-Futuh (composed-in-1291)- about the successful military campaigns of Sultan Jalal al-Din Khalji (T. 1290-96). However, it must be remembered that Amir Khusrau was not a historian. He has nowhere claimed to be a historian, nor was it his primary concern to record the past events. His chief aim was to demonstrate his literary ability. None the less, his works have great historical value for the study of the Delhi Sultanate.

Shams Siraj Afif; the Author of Tarikh-i Firuzshahi

Shams Siraj Afif, the author of Tarikh-i Firuzshahi, was a frequent attendant at the court of Sultan Firuz Tughluq. The work was composed during the reign of Sultan Firuz, to whom Afif dedicated it as well.

Isami; the Author of Futuh al-Salatin

Mawlana Isami composed his poetical work Futuh al-Salatin (Shahnamah-i Hind) in 1348 during the reign of Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq. However, Isami's family migrated to Dawlatabad in Deccan when the Sultan established his second capital. Though Isami's grandfather, Izz al-Din Isami, had served as a military commander under the Sultans of Delhi,

Isarni later got himself associated with the Bahmani Kingdom of Deccan, and dedicated his work to Sultan Ala al-Din Hasan (Bahman Shah), the founder of the Bahmani Kingdom, who had rebelled against Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq. The book covers the history from the Ghaznavid invasions of India to the history of the Sultanate of Delhi till 1349-50.

Ibn Battutah; the Author of Ajaib al-Asfar

The famous Moroccan traveler, Ibn Battutah, who wrote Ajaib al-Asfar, served under Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq for some time. Ajaib al-Asfar is primarily a travelogue, and not a book of history per se, but it provides very-useful information about the history-of the Sultanate era.

Muslim Historians of the Mughal Period

During the Mughal period, a number of rulers and influential people composed their memoirs or autobiographies. The most famous memoirs are the Tuzuk-i Babari, also known as Baburnamah, composed by Emperor Zaheer al-Din Babar (r. 1526-1530), and Tuzuk-i Jahangiri, composed by Emperor Nur al-Din Jahangir (T. 1605-1627). Moreover, a number of historians composed books mpe of history. What follows is a brief overview of the most important works and their author's contribution to historiography?

Nizam al-Din Ahmad Bakhshi -the Author of Tabaqat-i Akbari

Khwaja Nizam al-Din Ahmad Bakhshi (d. 1594) authored *Tabaqat-i Akbari* in three volumes, which was completed in 1593. He served as the bakhshi or military secretary under Emperor Jalal al-Din Mhuhammad Akbar (r. 1556-1605). His work covers the history of the first thirty-eight years of Emperor Akbar's reign, since the author died in 1594. The book is divided into nine sections called *fabaqa*, which deal with the following nine regions of the Mughal Empire: Delhi, Deccan, Gujarat, Bengal, Malwa, Jaunpur, Sindh, Kashmir and Multan. Khwaja Nizam al-Din has written the dynastic history of these regions till the time of their conquest by Emperor Akbar. However, the scheme of the recording of the history of the thirty-eight years of Akbar's reign is annual. In his work, he mentioned his sources, which are twenty-eight in number. The chronological sequence of historical events has been carefully maintained by the author. However, the author has merely narrated political history, without offering any causal explanation for historical events. Therefore, the author has not made any value-judgments in the book. The language and style of the book is simple. A significant contribution of the author is the idea of writing regional or provincial histories.

Abd al-Qadir Badayuni; the Author of Muntakhab al-Tawarikh

Abd al-Qadir- Badayuni (b. 1540-d. 1596) composed Muntakhab al Tawarikh (selections from History) in three volumes. It took him five years to compose the work, which was completed in 1596, the same year when the author died. The book starts from the reign of Subuktagin (r. 977-99), the King of Ghaznah, and the father of Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznah (T. 98-1030), and covers the history of the first forty years of Emperor Akbar's reign. It also provides important historical data and explanations about the history of the sultanate era. The third and last volume of the book includes biographical sketches of the luminaries associated with Emperor Akbar's court. Badayuni served under Emperor Akbar as an imam (prayer leader). He was also assigned the task of translating the sacred books of the Hindus in Persian language by the Emperor. The author is very critical of the policies of Akbar, especially his liberalism in religious matters, which he viewed as detrimental to Islam. Badayuni's approach is quite subjective. Unlike Barani, he offers no supernatural explanation for historical events, and attributes natural causes to phenomena like famine and drought.

Abul Fazl; the Author of Akbarnamah

Shaykh Abul Fażl (b. 1551-d. 1602) was the son of Shaykh Mubarak, a scholar, and the brother of Abul Fazl, the famous poet-philosopher

associated with Emperor Akbar's court. Abul Fazl rose to high position under Akbar and served as an administrator and military commander. Moreover, he was a friend and a confidant of the Emperor. Abul Fazl composed Akbarnamah on the order of the Emperor. It was completed in 1602, the year when Abul Fazl was executed at the order of Akbar's son, Prince Salim (later Emperor Jahangir). Akbarnamah has three volumes. The first two volumes cover the history of the Mughal Empire in India from Babur to Akbar's reign, while the third volume, which is titled Ain-i Akbari deals with the policies, administration, military organization, economy, resources, revenue and population of the Empire under Akbar. It is an annual chronicle of Akbar's reign. Abul Fazl's approach to historical interpretation was rational. Unlike other historians, he did not confine his history to the Muslim rulers and their achievements. He expanded the scope of history by discussing the religion, philosophy; traditions and customs of the Hindus in his work. He carefully scrutinized his sources. That is why he is considered to be first medieval Indian historian who recognized the significance or original sources. His approach to history was rational and secular, unlike rest of the medieval historians of India. Since Abul Fazl was patronized by Akbar, the explanations of the former about the policies and views of the latter are quite subjective. At times, Abul Fazl

indulged in flattery of the Emperor, and tried to justify the actions of the latter.

In a nutshell, many of the Muslim historians of premodern India contributed to historiography. Since many of them were associated with the courts, therefore, other accounts were not very Objective. Moreover, these works were elitist in nature, and generally ignored the perceptions, problems and conditions of the common people. In fact, these works were more in line with the ancient Persian traditions of historiography. K. A. Nizami writes that the historians of pre Islamic Sassanian Persia focused on the pomp and show of the court, the achievements of the Emperors and the history of their conquests, which was generally aimed at the glorification of the kings. On the contrary, they considered any reference to the common people or their problems as derogatory to the art of history-Writing. In this way, the "history of the age was converted into the "history of the kings.

A Brief Overview of Muslim Historiography in Modern South Asia

What follows is a brief overview of the contribution of three major Muslim historians of South Asia:

Shibli Naumani Shibli Naumani

(1857-1914) was born at Azamgarh, U.P., India. His most renowned historical work is a comprehensive biography of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) titled *Sirat al-Nabi*. He died after writing its first two volumes, so the remaining five volumes were written by his student, Syed Sulaiman Nadvi. Other famous works of Shibli include *Al-Farooq*, *Al-Mamun*, *Al-Ghazali*, and *Maulana Rumi*. He had scholarly command over many languages such as Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Urdu and Hindi. He is considered to be the first Muslim historian produced by the Aligarh School. Shibli saw a noble purpose in history-writing, and through his works, tried to establish the utility of history as a discipline. He tried to reconcile history with philosophy by presenting a philosophical view of history, and searching for universal truths in it. He undertook a critical study of the rise and fall of civilizations, and while, doing so, he particularly highlighted the significance of causation in history. He was conscious of the fact that many factors adversely influence history-writing. Therefore, in his monumental work, *Sirat al-Nabi*, he argued that the most important factor that adversely influences historiography is the political factor, since the ruling elite always try to pressurize the historians for producing historical narratives that serve the political interests of the former. He not only tried to revive the historiographical tradition among the Muslims in South Asia

through his historical works, he also tried to revive the heritage, culture and traditions of the Muslims in pre-partition India.

I. H. Qureshi

Dr. Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi (1903-1981), better known as I. H. Qureshi, was a renowned historian and educationist, who was born at Patiali, U.P., in pre-partition India. He taught history at Delhi University, University of the Punjab, and Columbia University, New York, and also served as Vice-Chancellor, University of Karachi. His most famous works include Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi (1942), The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (1962), The Struggle for Pakistan (1965), Administration of the Mughal Empire (1966), and Ulema in Politics (1972).

Being a proponent of Muslim nationalist discourse, Dr. Qureshi projected two nation theory on the basis of Hindu-Muslim differences, and provided a historical basis for it. He argued that in pre-partition India, there lived two completely separate nations or communities the Hindus and the Muslims. He highlighted the notion of separate identity of the Muslims in India, and argued that fearing a complete assimilation of the Muslims in Hindu community, the Muslims leaders such as Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi , popularly know it as Mujaddid-Alf-Thani, strived to preserve their separate identity. Dr. Qureshi interpreted the war of succession between Dara

Shikoh (executed 1659) and Aurengzeb Alamgir (r. 1658-1707), the sons of Mughal Emperor Shahjahan (r. 1628-58), as a conflict between the forces of heterodoxy and orthodoxy. In his Opinion, the victory of Aurengzeb Alamgir, who was orthodox and puritanical, proved to be the political culmination of the Mujaddidi movement.

Further expanding his Muslim nationalist perspective in historiography, he defended the All India Muslim League's demand for a separate Muslim state, and stressed the role of Islam or the ideological factor in the Freedom Movement. After studying the historical development of the Muslim community in Indian Sub-continent, he interpreted the emergence of Pakistan in 1947 as a natural outcome of the historical processes.

S. M. Ikram

Sheikh Muhammad Ikram (1908-1971), better known as S. M. Ikram, was a renowned Pakistani bureaucrat, educationist and historian, who was born at Lyallpur (now called faisalabad). He was a prolific author, who wrote a number of books on history. His most important works on history include Makers of Pakistan and Modern Muslim India (1950; later republished with the title Indian Muslims and the Partition of India), Ab-i Kausar, Rud-i

Kausar, *Mauj-i Kausar*, *Muslim Civilization in India* (1964), *Muslim Rule in India and Pakistan* (1966), and *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan, 1858-1951* (1970).

Like I. H. Qureshi, S. M. Ikram also tried to trace the roots of Hindu-Muslim separatism in the history of the Indian Sub-continent. He tried to reconstruct the history of the Muslims in India by assuming a neat demarcation between the Hindu and Muslim communities in political, religious, social and cultural terms. Writing from the Muslim nationalist perspective, he argued that Pakistan had come into being the day when the Arab-Muslim armies landed in Sindh in early eighth century. He glorified the efforts of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi and Mughal Emperor Aurengzeb in crystallizing the separate Muslim identity in India, while he condemned the efforts or religious syncretism in India, and the role of personalities like Mughal Emperor Akbar (d. 1605) in this regard, who tried to bring the two supposed communities together. Like I. H. Qureshi, he also tried to de-emphasize the local South Asian roots of the Pakistanis