

Eighteenth Century Debate: A Re-Appraisal of Persian and Urdu Sources

Dr. Md. Shakil Akhtar

Asisstant Professor (History)
Pt. Shri Chand Sharma Memorial Degree College
Dr . B R A University Formerly Agra University
Permanent Address: Baki Pur, p.o.: Laheria Sarai
*Darbhangha, Bihar, 846001*¹*

The eighteenth century represents a crucial period in Indian history. It saw the devolution of hegemony from Mughal imperialism to British colonialism. This century in Indian history was unfortunate in that it was between the political glory of the great Mughals and the humiliations of colonial rule. Reflecting nature of Indian history in 18th century is a matter of debate among historians. European administrative historians and contemporary observers like Henry Beveridge, James Mill and John Marshmann etc. held the view that eighteenth century was a 'dark age' for India. This perspective became an integral part of the 20th century writing on eighteenth century Indian history. Thus L.S.S.O. Mally, B.T. Macaulay, Percival Spear, W. Irwin, Jadunath Sarkar, Tara Chand etc. either explicitly or implicitly refer to the decline and decadence of Indian society, Polity, Economy and Culture. This was happen due to the first modern writer of Indian history, the early British historian, had their own interest in projecting as an anarchic role of their immediate predecessor and early 20th century writer on the eighteenth century uncritically accepted their projection. This essay is an attempt to evaluate the value of their historical sources i.e. Persian and Urdu. As Ibn-i-khaldun in his '*Muqaddima*' laid down that cultural differences of another age, role of state, propaganda and systematic bias in history must govern the evaluation of relevant historical material. He often criticized 'uncritical acceptance' of historical data. Islamic historical method also laid down that it is necessary to verify which *Isnad* (source of tranmission) were more reliable and which are less and negligible. In the light of Ibn-i-khaldun's critical analysis of historical data and sources this paper is an attempt to brought the importance and value of eighteenth

*This paper was earlier presented in national seminar on 'sources of Medieval india: chronicles, literature, Architecture, paintings, epigraph and coins' held on 12th -14th March 2011 organised by Department of History, A.M.U., Aligarh.

century 's Persian and Urdu sources for history writing of this most debated century.

It is true that contemporary Persian chroniclers projected the period as one of chaos and decline. As they were protégés of officers of East India Company and clergymen. Earlier they were beneficiaries of the Mughal imperial system; with the decadence of Mughal Empire their fortune also decline. They deprived from employment, thus they faced stiff financial crisis, and British officers came forward and patronize them with their own interest. The Britishers becoming aware that indigenous patronage of hindu and muslim learning was beginning to decline ;they desired to substitute British patronage for that of the Indian prince. On May 25, 1798, the Madras government wrote to the Bengal government that encouragement formerly given..... to persian literature, has ceased; that hardly any new works of celebrity appear and that few copies of books of established character, are now made." The decline of their fortune has been portrayed as the decline and decay of entire society; they also criticized to the Mughal emperors, nobles and the whole administration.

Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai author of '*siyar-ul-mutakhrin*' has been spoken in highest terms by Lord Macaulley, James Mill, H.H.Wilson, H.M.Elliot, Charles Stewart, H.G.Keene, Rai Bankim Chandra Chaterji and other leading historians. Tabatabai wrote this work for British officials edification under their aegis, if not direct patronage. After his father's death elder brother Ghulam Haider acted as representative of Kasim Ali Khan in Calcutta till his suspected attachment to the English occasioned his removal. He was then engaged in various services under British East India Company and had received many marks of favor from General Goddard. Whom, he attended on several enterprises. Ghulam Hussain in his work praises on General Goddard and other English individual, who directly or indirectly helped him. Shahnawaz Khan, author of '*Masir-ul- Umra*' and Ghulam Hussain Salim author of '*Riyaz-us-Salatin*' also wtote for British official edification. They have interest in depicting the tribulation of traditional honor and prestige.

A group of 18th century Persian chroniclers belong to the protégé of East India Company's officials. They had written the Persian chronicles on the instigation of their master, so that they might translate into English and forward it to the England. In this way they justify their conquest over India.

Murtuza Hussain author of '*Hadiqat-ul-Aqalim*' confess in preface that he was introduced to captain Jonathan Scott, Persian secretary of Warren Hasting in 1776 A.D., who appointed him as '*Munshi*' and induced him to undertake this work.

He has an eye to his own interest in this compilation as he written down "If the work shall ever be pursued by the intelligent and learned English, it is expected that taking into their consideration the troubles and old age of the author, they will always do him the favor of maintaining their kind regards towards him and his descendents, especially as this was the first Persian work comprised under their auspices, which gave a history of the establishment of the British empire." This supplication has been granted and his son has been raised to high office under the British government. He further written down that this was submitted for the inspection to Captain Scott and Colonel Polier, before engrossed. The same work has been used by Captain Scott for his work '*Aurangzeb's Successors*'. Sadasukh Dehlawi author of '*Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*' was employed at the close of 18th century under British government in

some official capacity at *Chunar*. He proclaims that he not followed the plan of other historians, who being in the service of powerful kings, have obtained reward and promotion by their chieftains have made mountains out of a mole and suns out of atoms. He further said that his one foot in the grave and wished for no other recompense than the praise of honest men, only ambition was to have a good name behind him, was determined to write without fear or favor.

Elliot and Dowson remark, in spite of this declaration, it is gratifying to find him taking every opportunity to praise the English expressing his gratitude. Another contemporary historian of 18th century Bahadur Singh author of '*Yadgar-i-Bahaduri*' concluded his work that there are more lies than truth in history.

Sheo Parsad compiled very valuable work '*Tarikh-i-Faiz Bakhsh*' history of Ruhella Afghan, on the earnest desire of general Kirkpatrick in 1776 A.D. that he might translate into English and forward it to England.

Abu Talib 'Londani' author of '*Lubbus Siyar*' was employed under Shuja-Ud-Daula and Asaf-ud-Daula. In the reign of Asf-ud-Daula, he lost his office and came to seek his subsistence from the English. He was used to indulge in versification of English women, in his verse he aspire to equal with the angels of paradise and always expatiating on the heart of ravishing strains of the women of England.

Ghulam Basit author of '*Tarikh-i-Mamalik-i-Hind*' was living on rent free tenures in the province of Oudh, was resumed and he was reduced to the greatest distress and embarrassment. He was disappointed and poverty forced him to seek employment under the English. He assumed the name of '*Munshi*' in order to secure his daily bread. He further inform us that through the grace of God and kindness of his master, he at last obtained a sufficient provision for himself and children and always prey God for the welfare of the English and frequently mention their generosity and courage.

'*Tarikh-i-Shahdat-i-Farrukh Siyar wa Julus-i-Mohammad Shahi*' written by Mirza Mohammad Bakhsh Ashob, the author in his preface, speaks of the English in highly eulogistic terms. He specially mentions Captain Jonathan Scott, whose learning and acquirement, he extols in verse and for whose encouragement, he is grateful. He also acknowledges the countenance and kindness which received from colonel Polier at Lucknow.

'*Haft Gulshan-i-Mohammad Shahi*' written by Mohammad Hadi Kamwar Khan, he inform us that from early period he had interest in reading history of kings and Saints and that why he entered into the service of Aurangzeb 'the destroyer of all signs of superstition and idolatry'. Later he was reduced to great distress from the occurrence of certain miserable accident and he conceived disgust for the entire world and everything in it, insomuch that no taste for any kind of occupation remained in his mind. In these afflicting circumstances anyone came forward to assist him and he accompanied that officer, is an angel in his eyes. He also considered the corner of a house and old mat to sit on, better than the lofty palaces of the lords of splendor and magnificence. The fire of grief burnt up the harvest of his hopes, destroying the stock of patience and nothing remained to him but sighs and tears.

On the other hand Khushhal Chand author of '*Tarikh-i-Nad'ir-u-Zamani*' employed in the diwani office of Delhi, expressed himself well satisfied, as it enabled him to fulfil the duties of both world. In compliment to the Emperor Mohammad

shah, under whom he was employed, he call his work '*Tarikh-i-Mohammad Shahi*' to which he gives the honorific title of '*Nadir-uz-Zamani*' the wonder of the world.

British East India Company's officers patronized a number of 18th century Persian chroniclers i.e. colonel Bailie a resident of Lucknow patronized to Syed Ghulam Ali author of '*Nigar Nama-i- Hind*', Mir Ghulam Ali author of '*Imad-us-Sadat*', Mohammad Riza author of '*Majma-ul-Mulk*' and '*Zabdat-ul-Gharaib*', Ram Chatar Man author of '*Chahar Ghulshan*', Khairuddin Mohammad author of '*Balwant Nama*' and Mohammad Bakhsh Ashob author of '*Tarikh-i- Shahadat- Farrukh Siyar wa Julus-i- Mohammad Shahi*' under the patronage of Jonathan Scott. Even Col. Colin Mackenzie established a corps of Indian scholars who scoured the south India for vernacular and classical manuscript and wrote down the oral traditions of the regions. Under his influence the Indian scholars adopted the critical viewpoint of India. Edward Said rightly remarked that "A western style of dominating, restructuring and having authority over the orient and used orientalism as an instrument of empire building .

The picture of the ruin and devastation of Delhi, Agra and other towns in 18th century largely based on contemporary Urdu poetry of Jafar Zattali (1659?-1713?), Hatim (1699-1783), Sauda (1706-1781), Mir (1722/23-1810) and Dard (1722-1785) etc . In evaluation of poetry a distinction must be made between the objective reflection of social reality in their poetry and the poets own understanding and also due to the great exaggeration, where they using techniques of poetry i.e. *Tazad* (contrast words), *Tashbeeh* (simily), *Mubalgha Arai* (hyperbole), *Ishtaara* (metaphor) etc.

E.J.W.Gibb claims that the *shahar ashob* first appears in the Turkish literary tradition where it was called *shaharangez* . Platts have been defined it "A disturber of the peace of a city(met.) a mistress, --- a poem of a ruined city. The *shaharashob* in Turkish and Persian having two most important aspects firstly, humorous qualities and secondly, listing of profession. As the *shaharashob* develop the humorous element as well as the listing of the professions was retained and the dimensions of satire, disgust, protest, or anger were added. It was in this form that *shaharashob* came into the Urdu literary tradition. From eighteenth century onwards Urdu poems begin to be written on natural events, political matters, climatic phenomena, quality of life in the small and large towns etc. Contemporary life is often reflected in the new genre of *shaharashob*, which is mainly about the change, or even a reversal in the order of things. While Urdu critics have been somewhat generous in treating *shaharashob* poems as historical evidence and have disregarded it's conventions, these poems have a faux contemporary flavor, because poems are long uneven pretending to represent the vision of reality. There are however, honorable exceptions to this. The most notable works of this type was the work of Niamat Ali Khan, which dealt with the decline of Golkunda after its conquest of Aurangzeb, equally noteworthy of Urdu writings satirical poetry. Zafar Zattali, the first notable Urdu writer from Delhi was a savage political satirist, humorist, a huge enjoyer of words for their own sake, in his *Ashob-i-Zamana*.

Gaya ikhlas alam se, ajab yeh daur aya hai
Dare sab khalq zalim se, ajab yeh daur aya hai
Na yaro me rahi yari, na bhaiyon me wafadari

Muhabbat uth gae sari, ajab yeh daur aya hai
Na bole raast koi, umar sab jhuth me khoi
Utari sharm ki loee, ajab ye daur aya hai
Hunar mandan harjaee, phire dar dar bair saidaee
Razal qaumon ki ban aayee, ajab yeh daur hai

The above *ashob-i-zamana* shows that the decline of a town / city meant the end of a way of life, of the decline of a whole class of people, the *umara* and the *shurafa*, who provided patronage to the *hunarmandan* (skilled) i.e. poets, the artisans, and the artists from door to door seeking patronage. Their eclipse coincided with the rise of the low classes (*razal qaum*) the butchers, the vegetable sellers, the weavers, something which could hardly have been possible if the population of the city had declined as drastically as they imply or the industries been totally ruined.

Shah Hatim(1699-1783), the first delhi poet to create a big following for himself, wrote longer prose text satirizing physicians in general and perhaps the physicians of those times in particular. Hatim's nonsense is quite as delightful and outrageous as *zattali*, both these pieces are best read as humour for its own sake not for history.

Sauda(1706-1781) is recognized as a great *qasidah* poet, greatest in urdu. But *qasidahs* have long been regarded in modern urdu circles as exercises in hyperbole, full of flights of fancy, mostly in bad taste, and certainly "deviod" of "reality". Muhammad Hssain Azad's *Ab-e-Hayat* the most popular book on the history of eighteenth and nineteenth century urdu poetry said this about *sauda's* satires:

His fieriness and the sharp swiftness of his temperament had the effect of lighting--and a force that no reward could extinguish, and no danger could suppress.....Then closing the eyes of modesty and opening the mouth of shamelessness, he said such wild things that even satan would ask for a truce.

The Urdu *hajv* and *shahrashob* are just *hajv* or *qasidah*. A *qasidah* may have a moral purpose, it may contains element of satire, but it does not attack human folly or wickedness; an eighteenth century *shahrashob* may have both humour and satire but essentially it's a poem saying that the world is not functioning true to its laws: roles and characters have been reversed; a *hajv* is a poem with a specific target, its purpose is to ridicule someone or something, never mind what you say about the target is based on facts or not. The more scurrilous the term of ridicule, the better the *hajv*.

Sauda's most famous poem '*Tazhik-e-Rozgar*' (Ridiculing the times). It's *qasidah* in the classic *shahrashob* mode: the world is not running according to rules. In order to illustrate this, the poet picks up different professions and tells us in a serio-comic way how bad is the state in which they have fallen. Poet enlisted soldier, caller to prayer in a mosque, companion to a noble. Physician, trader and merchant, agriculturist, a *nawab's* representative or petty diplomat, poet, tutor, calligrapher, sufi master or shaikh and nobles. Scholars have not dated poem but internal evidence suggest that it before 1774 because Hafiz Rahmat Khan has been mentioned in the poem as if he were alive at the time of writing. The environment suggest delhi around the middle of the century. The picture is not historical, is it entirely imaginary. Its beauty is not in its so-called realism, or "truth" of which there isn't much anyway.

If we are to take literally the *shahar Ashob* of Sauda, it would seem that life had come to standstill in Delhi, the nobles were without means and unable to maintain

their employees, even women of respectful classes had been reduced to begging. He goes on to say that the *shurafa* (high class people) reaped nothing except humiliation hardships, even they resorted to other profession such as medicine, law, soldiery, sale and purchase of goods, book binding, and clergymen and even cultivation. He assert that business was so bad that let alone profit.

Sauda and Zafar Zattali's observation must have been based on personal observation. In the light of above, it would be misleading to characterize the process at work during 18th century. In fact, vertical mobility was characteristic feature of the 18th century, many old families were ruined, while everywhere bold, adventurers without any title to land or power forging ahead. The rise of men like the Sindhias and the Holkars, Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan are some of the most notable examples of this tendency.

In fact *shahar ashob* were stylized Urdu eulogies about changing social manners they dwelt on the times of the rise of inexperienced, incompetent people to power, decline of values etc. same expression was given by a contemporary poet Khawja Mir Dard as:

“*Sultanat par kuchh nahi mauqoof
Jis ke hath awe so jam-i- jam hai*”

(Greatness is no longer the privilege of kings

Whosever can lay hand on the cup becomes cup of *jamshed*)

Shahar Ashob is not the decline of a particular urban environment or even of economic collapse but rather of the expression of change in what nowadays is historically called mentalite the end of a way of life, of the decline of a whole class of people i.e. the *umara* and the *shurafa*. Yet the *shahar ashob* tell us much about the general mentality of the entire period of transition.

On the other hand contemporary British observers who came to India in this century paint the period of Mughal rule as an idyllic one in which all section prospered and many of them were paint that Indian states were prosperous, trade and industry flourished till the British intervened. Scafton says that “What greater proof need we of the goodness of the government than the immense revenue their country yeild, many of the jentoo province yield a revenue in proportion of extent of territory equal to our richest countries in Europe and yet like us they have no mines but draw their wealth from the labour of their hands.”

Scafton also remarks that “I am amazed to see that all the writers have asserted that there are no laws in this country that the land is not hereditary and that the Emperor is universal heir. I am ready to allow there are no written institutes and there is no power to control the emperor, but I must assert that they proceed in their courts of justice by established precedents that the lineal succession, where there are children is as indefensible here as in any country that has no check on the supreme power.” Bolts and Holwell are more or less of the same view as Scafton.

Thus we can say that the character of the indigenous elements and the socio-economic and political structure of eighteenth century need to analyse regional sources not just Persian and Urdu sources (the language of the ruling imperial classes in eighteenth century) but also in the regional vernaculars such as Hindi, Marathi, Panjabi, Tamil, Bengali, Mulyali, Assamese, and other language. English travellers'

accounts is also equally important and much new material, which add a mass specific data to our knowledge to the need for systematising of the socio-economic and political structure of the most debated eighteenth century.

Note and References:

- [1] Mill. James, 'The *History of British India*' (3rd ed., 6 vol., London, 1826) I, v-ix, II, 46-47, 51-3, 54, 66, 70-2; John Clark Marshman, '*The History of India from the earliest period to the close of Lord Dalhausie's Administration*', (3vols.), London, 1867;
- [2] J.N.Sarkar, *The Fall of the Mughal Empire*, (4vols., Calcutta, 1950), IV, 343-44; Tarachand, *History of Freedom Movement in India*(2vols, Delhi, 1961) I, 217-18; L.S.S.O.Mally, '*Modern India and the West*', ;Thomas George Percival Spears, '*Master of Bengal: Clive and his India*'; William Irvine, '*Later Mughals*', (2vol.)repr. New Delhi, 1971
- [3] Barun De, '*problems of the study of Indian history*, P.I.H.C., 1989, P.13; Satish Chandra, 'The Eighteenth century in India' in satish chandra, eds, '*Essay on medieval Indian history*', p.85.
- [4] Ibn -i- Khaldun, Franz Rosenthal, N.J. Dawood (1967), *The Muqaddima: An Introduction to history*, p. x.
- [5] Ahmad, I. A, (June3, 2002) "*The rise and fall of Islamic science: The calendar as a case study*", 'Faith and reason: convergence and complimentarily'
- [6] Barun De, op. cit., p.13; Athar Ali, *The eighteenth century: An Interpretation*, I.H.R, Vols. 5th, 1978-79, p.184. 7.
- [7] Madras government, public consultations, vol. 250, Feb.1801.
- [8] Barun De, op.cit. p. 13 ;M. Athar Ali, op.cit., p.184.
- [9] H.M. Elliot, ' *The History of India as told by its own Historians*' (8 vols.London, 1877), viii, p. 190.
- [10] Ibid, p. 191.
- [11] Ibid, p.192.
- [12] Barun De, op.cit. p.13.
- [13] Elliot, op.cit. p.180.
- [14] Ibid., p.181.
- [15] Ibid., p.182.
- [16] Ibid., p.403.
- [17] Ibid., P.404 .
- [18] Ibid. p.417-18.
- [19] Ibid. p.175-76.
- [20] Ibid. p.298-99.
- [21] Ibid. p.200-01.
- [22] Ibid.pp. 232-33
- [23] Ibid pp.70-71.
- [24] Ibid.p. 70-71
- [25] Ibid. pp.232-233

- [26] Mackenzie collection, general, xv, 173 .
- [27] Edward Said, (1978), *Orientalism*, (vintage book publication, U.S.A.), P.3
- [28] Mark pegors, (1990) 'A *Shaharashob of Sauda*', Journal of South Asian Literature, vol. xxv, no.1, p.89.
- [29] Platts, (1974) Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English (cambridge:oxford university press), p.738
- [30] Mark pegors, (1990), *A shaharashob of Sauda*, Journal of South Asian Literature, vol.xxv no.1, p.90
- [31] Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *The Satires of Sauda*(1706-1781), university of Hidelberg, September 2010, p.3
- [32] Ibid.p.3
- [33] Naim Ahmad (ed.) *kulliyat-i- jafar zattali*, Aligarh, 1977, pp.142-45.
- [34] Satish Chandra (ed.), 'Essay on Medieval Indian History', "*The eighteenth century in India*", New Delhi, 2003, p.82.
- [35] Muhammad Hussain Azad, *Ab-e-Hayat*, translated and edited by Frances pritchet in association with Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, New Delhi.OUP., 2003, PP.152-153.
- [36] Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, op.cit. ,p.9.
- [37] Sauda, *Kulliyat*, I, p.364.
- [38] Satish Chandra, op. cit., p. 84.
- [39] Ibid, p.83
- [40] Mir Dard, *Diwan-i-Dard*, (Delhi, 1982), p.90 .
- [41] Barun De, op.cit., p.14.
- [42] Luke Scrafton, *Reflection on the Revolution of our Time*, London, 1763, p.21 .
- [43] Luke Scrafton, Ibid., p.25-26
- [44] Satish Chandra, op. cit., p.85.
- [45] Thomas Twining, '*Travels in India: A hundred years ago*, London, 1893; Valentia, '*voyages and Travels to India*, vol.I, ;George Foster, '*A Journey from Bengal to England*; W. Hodges, '*Travels in India during 1780-83*; Luke Scrafton, '*Reflection on the Government of Bengal*, London, 1763; Thomas Duer Broughten, '*Letter written in the Maratha camp during the year 1809*, new edition with introduction M.E.Grant Duff, New Delhi, 1995; J. Henry Grose, *A Voyages to the East Indies began in 1750 with observation till 1764*, London, 1766;