

Communal historiography and Distortion of Historicity: A Re-Interpretation of Medieval India

Imon-ul-Hossain

Department of History, Coochbehar Panchanan Barma University, West Bengal, India

Email - imonulhossain@gmail.com

Abstract: “History” as a prominent discipline of Social science is co-related with two basic philosophical treatment namely – subjectivity and objectivity. In 21st century, precisely after the invention of new historical method objectivity has given the first priority to write true history based on fully unbiased and scientific introspection through which a historian or scholar works as a judge for the reconstruction of impartial subjective analysis. However, individual lives are bounded by numerous psychological behaviors, therefore, it is very difficult to exempt completely from biasness. But it is possible to reach in very approximation of truth as told by renowned historian R.C. Majumdar “the ascertainment of truth, so far it can be ascertained...is the one object, the one sanction, of all historical studies”.

Keywords: Historiography, Communalism, Muslim, Nationalist, Marxist, Objectivity.

The journey of medieval Indian history writing in modern age academically started under the effort of colonial British scholars. Initially, their main objective was to be acquainted profoundly with the cultural heritage, tradition and rituals of India which could facilitate the process of imperial expansion as well as to set up psychological sway over the diversity of inhabitants, religion and region. In that case, medieval period was near past to British rule because although Mughals lost their power but still the influence of administrative practices had not fully been eliminated from the root of Indian subcontinent. Hence, these scholars intended to explore medieval period with two major perspective- one is the translation of medieval Indian sources and another is the writing of medieval Indian history. However, we need to clarify one thing here that these colonial scholars were not professional historian even they had no philosophical and methodological concept of history, therefore, their compositions were mostly associated with politics and administration where less emphasis has given to society, culture, peoples and economic history. That’s why, they had no effort to write a ‘total history’ of medieval India.

The writing of Medieval Indian history by Indian historian said to have begun as a counter force against British colonial thought, but despite in some cases the nationalist historians were held responsible to distort the impartial historical perception. In this respect, it is essential to know that although these scholars claimed to be the founder of anti-British opinion but they seemed to be invisibly biased, especially with the idea of Hindu-Muslim glory. Rightly pointed out by Romila Thapar “an examination of the ideology of modern communalism shows quite clearly that it seeks its intellectual justification from the historical past. Thus, Hindu communalist try and project an ideal Hindu society in the ancient period Equally, Muslim communalists try and prove the roots of separatism from the beginning of the medieval period onwards, i.e. from the 11th or 13th century AD.”¹

The Muslim historian of colonial period used the same approach to praise this period as much as they can and very strategically, they concealed the shortcomings of this period. In that case the example of Muhammed Habib can be alluded who argued for a rural and urban revolution during the Delhi Sultanate. He disseminated that the Ghorian Turks replaced the *Thakurs* as the ruling class and then imparted the Indian city-worker who had been compelled to live outside of main city in accordance to Brahmanical order, the Turks manumitted them from this restriction. Habib in his most genuine work “Mahmud of Ghaznin” had tried to restore a figure of Mahmud not as a Muslim warrior but as corrupted. We have another work of Muhammad Nazim “The Life and Times of *Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna*”, here he remarked that Mahmud’s aim was not iconoclasm, and was not fanatic because he had not aimed to demolish Hindu temple at time of peace². A dissention has been apparent from the opinion of K.M. Ashraf because he didn’t visualize any such revolution in Indian life during that period. He was presumably the first historian of this group to define a materialistic picture of this century. As he opined directly “Islam was not a fundamental revolution in the basic condition of Indian life...”³. One of a leading historian of medieval India I.H. Qureshi who had worked upon the Administration of Delhi Sultanate and Mughal period. He blindly treated the both period as welfare state based on tolerance, benevolence in which Hindus were not ill-treated. Prof. Qureshi was the path-finder of S.M. Ikram and Mainul Haq. Specially, in the context of Akbar’s policy making prof. Qureshi has given a religious fundamentalistic interpretation, “the most obvious

reason was that Akbar changed the nature of polity profoundly. The Muslims were still a dominant group in the state, but it had ceased to be a Muslim state... now Muslims were only one of the communities in the empire which controlled the council and the armed might of the state. Akbar had weakened Islam through his politics". He also disseminated that Akbar was responsible for the decay of Mughal empire he provided much priority towards Hindus rather than Muslim wherein Aurangzeb did great effort to preserve the rights of Muslims by proclaiming an Islamic state in Hindustan. In a lecture of Pakistan Historical society, famous historian of medieval period, stated that "the Indian and western historians had tried to create a wrong impression by interpretation of the benign policies of Aurangzeb Alamgir, which he had initiated for the welfares of the people and the progress of his empire..."⁴. These viewpoints popularize Aurangzeb and degenerated Akbar as a great monarch. It's a curse that those scholars founded the ideological root of two nation theory by emphasizing the greatness of Muslim civilization.

During pre-independence and post-independence period medieval history writing had experienced so much debate on communal ground, in this respect the Hindu nationalist scholars emerged to counter the Muslim-oriented medieval centric arguments as enumerated before. I would like to do an overview on two most notable scholar of medieval India from where their communal approach can be discernible. One is Prof K.S. Lal and another is K.I. Srivastava. In his "Theory and Practice of Muslim State in India" K.S. Lal explained the concept of "Jihad" in Muslim India. In this regard his example can be cited "The chroniclers of the early Turkish rulers of India take pride in affirming that Qutbuddin Aibak was a killer of Lakhs of infidels. Leave aside enthusiastic killers like Aladdin Khalji and Muhammed Bin Tughlaq, even the kind heated Firoz Tughlaq killed more than a lakh Bengalis when he invaded their country. Timur lang or Tamerlane says he killed a hundred thousand infidel prisoners of war in Delhi...In Katehar and Mewat there were systematic massacres of Rajputs and Mewatis in the true spirit of Jihad...". Simultaneously, he traced such Jihad in Mughal period which may surprise every reader "This is borne out by the difference in Babar's attitude and actions in his two wars one against the Muslim Ibrahim Lodhi and the other against the Hindu Rana Sanga. Babar's war against Ibrahim Lodhi was only a war, against Rana Sangram Singh it was Jihad...on the other hand, the story of battle of Khanwa against Rana Sanga in march 1527 has been described in the royal memories in an entirely different idiom. In its Rana Sanga is repeatedly called a pagan(kafir) with studied contempt. His nobles and soldiers are similarly abused repeatedly...". Regarding Babar's action Prof. Lal remarked "...after the victory over Rana Sanga, Babar took the title of Ghazi or victor in holy war. As trophy of victory "an order was given to set up a pillar of pagan heads". Similar tower of pagan heads was piled up after the success at Chanderi against Medini Rai...". The language betrays the psychology developed by the ideology of jihad contained in Islamic scriptures. The ideology is not of universal brotherhood. Its brotherhood is confined to Muslim only. Even in emperor Akbar's 'secular' reign the religious spirit of Jihad was not lost... Akbar was so pleased at the expression of allegiance to his person and to the Islamic idea of Jihad that he bestowed a handful of gold coins on Badaoni as a token of pleasure.". Now these all interpretations have no scientific ground. In medieval period although no doubt there that sometime most of the war incidents had been incited on the issue of 'Jihad' to receive a psychological cooperation from Muslim armies. It must not be disregarded when Akbar occupied Chittor he specifically issued "Fatehnama-i-chittor" as victory promulgation even left liberal historians has not been able concealed this covert political anti-Hindu action of Akbar.

Regarding the source of income in medieval age he enumerated several biased opinions. It can be cited from his text "taxes were collected from the people. From defeated rajas and zamindars huge amounts were extorted as war indemnities. When the capital city of a raja or any other important city of his kingdom was attacked, the people were robbed, the temple treasures were ruffled and rajas fleeced. Full advantage was taken of their helpless state. The wealth collected from these sources filled the treasuries of the sultans and badshahs. Punjab and Gujarat had surrendered wealth and treasures on many occasions to Mahmud Ghaznavid, Qutbuddin Aibak and Shamsuddin Iltutmish." In terms of Jizya tax he again reiterated same kinds statement "Jizya was imposed in India from the day of the Muslims set foot in the country. after capturing Brahmanabad, Muhammed bin Qasim levied jizyah on the population according to three grades. The first was to pay silver equal to 48 dirhams, the second 24 dirhams and the lowest 12 dirhams. According to Feristah the Hindu Shahiya king Jayapala, when defeated by Subuktigin, offered to pay jizyah and kharja to him."⁵

The Hindu historiography received further impetus from a prominent teacher of medieval history academically who is from the history department of Banaras Hindu university, Prof. Kanaiyalal Srivastava. In his work he has given a comparison of Muslim state's policy between the Ahmadist followers, precisely who are Jews and Christians and the pagans. He used to argue that the treatment of Muslim monarchs were considerably better towards those Jews and Christians as in accordance to Islamic belief they are the Ahl-ul-Kitab (have canonical text given by any prophet such as Jesus and Moses), wherein such provisions were inapplicable to the Hindus of India because they had no inter-relation with Ahl-ul-Kitab. That's why either the idolaters should accept Islam or to choose death.

K.L. Srivastava states “the Islamic law does not support the doctrine of unbelief, nor does it legally in the acts of non-Muslims. The Islamic law takes into cognizance only those traditions and customs of the non-Muslims as are accepted in general by them and not by isolated individuals.....Hearsay is not permitted in Islam and since heretics believe in the essential principles of Islam, the Islamic law is applicable to them. But the application of the laws to them depends upon the territorial jurisdiction of the Imam.”⁶

Now the discussion of communal partiality can be critically assessed on two ground that how these Hindu and Muslim communalist historians used specific sources to prove their specific arguments. I have written an article on Sultan Aladdin Khalji which based on the theocratic treatment of his imperial policy it can be discernible from there about how these scholars were pre-determined to prove their own arguments. Historians like K.S. Lal and Kanhaiyalal Srivastava in all of their explanation emphasized only on the wrongdoings of Sultan’s action through his temple destruction, concept of Zimmi and collection of Jizya tax, wherein they have largely ignored other great achievements of Sultan which he has initiated for the well-being of his Subjects, irrespective of caste, creeds and community bias. These scholars pick up their sources from the translation work of Henry Elliot and Johnson Downson, in which they sometime took irrelevant context by abstaining from the totality of interpretation, in fact, further we are more familiar that colonial scholars and their explanation in source history writing reflected numerous deficiencies by which Indian history distorted its impartial importance. Moreover, Kanhaiyalal Srivastava while describing Alauddin’s attitude and action towards the Hindus very strategically he enumerated the statements of Prof.Mohammed Habib, S.M. Jaffar, K.A. Nizami, I.H. Qureshi and K.S. Lal with an intention that their viewpoints too supporting his arguments, but unfortunately his effort has proven wrong. I have to point out here that Prof.K.L.Srivastava while describing about Sultans different action he widely used selected sources such as Amir Khusrau’s ‘Mifta-ul-Futhu’, ‘Khazain-ul-Futuh’(he never used the praises which Khusrau wrote for Sultan) Barani’s ‘Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi’, but he avoids other notable contemporary account like Firishtah’s ‘Gulshan-i-Ibrahimi’ and Isami’s ‘Fatah-us-Salatin’. Looking at the next aspects where Dr.Ghulam Sarwar Khan Niazi opposed earlier arguments showing a benevolent figure of Sultan. However, his exertion must not be disregarded, in fact, he had projected Sultan’s diverse reforms in accordance with relevant sources. But despite, Dr. Niazi in several of his aspect exaggerated Sultan’s icon, presumably in order to conceal his iniquities. As instance, he never focused on temple destruction and alluded rather “there are no facts to indicate that Alauddin ever violated this spirit and forced upon Hindus, a treatment that could be criticized on this ground. This background should suffice to vindicate the Position of Alauddin in respect of his attitude towards the Hindus”⁷. Moreover, cleverly he emphasized upon economic and market reforms in which he sought to reveal that Sultan was in favor of Hindus to avoid shortcomings.

As a part of this strategical uses of historical sources I must now analyze here that how the two different kinds of medieval narratives have been placed or some time excluded to prove particular ground of approach. As shown by prof. Aziz Ahmed in his most introspective article “Epic and Counter Epic in medieval India”⁸, Muslim rule in India contributed two literary growth one is the Muslim epic of conquest and another is the Hindu epic of resistance. Now these literatures had psychological roots of the contemporary authors who sought to glorify specific communities and war heroes. The Muslim narratives developed through *Qasidas*(panegyrics) mostly which were developed on the occasion of campaign by the Muslim kings in various Hindu kingdom. Now in medieval period we have few examples of notable compositions about the annals of Muslim victory. In this regard, Amir khusrau’s *Miftah al Futuh* is the first war epic (*Razmiya*), it alluded four victory of Jalal-Al-Din Khalji, two of them against Hindu raja. The next work of Amir Khusrau, *Khazain al Futuh* was written in prose form and the conquest of Turks against the Hindus had been glorified. The Khalji campaign of Deccan was exalted as a bravado of iconoclasm. Khusrau’s next epic “*Ashiq*” was courtly (*Bazmiya*) in subject, related to the love story of Alauddin Khalji’s son Khizr Khan for the Hindu princess of Gujrat, Dewal Rani. Here one psychological perspective is apparent that is the recognition of conquer’s right of possession upon the dominated Hindu beloved. Khusrau, beyond dispute as a poet laureate, is the only individual figure of medieval century who said to have represented the pluralistic depiction of Hindustan and his genius authorship incorporated both the major and micro beauty of Hindustan’s culture, peoples, nature and environment. But one may surprise to see his quotation about how he provided a Muslim majoritarian tendency

“Happy Hindustan, the splendors of religion, where the (Muslim holy) law finds perfect honor and security.... the strong men of Hind have been trodden under foot and are ready to pay tribute. Islam is triumphant and idolatry is subdued.”⁹

Amir Khusrau’s last epic Tughluq Nama had an actual objective to signify the re-establishment of Muslim power in India by his hero Ghiyath al Din Tughluq

We have another most remarkable work of a medieval author Muhammed Isami, although it has been claimed that mostly he received embolden from his previous writer Nizami and Firdausi, but indeed he continued the tradition of

Amir Khusrau. In his writing he has manifested the greatness of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni who made the Muslim victory, simultaneously, emphasized the superiority of Muslims over the Hindus.

Now as a counter reaction we have also Hindu Epic of resistance. This literary tradition started developing immediately after the advent of Muslims. Initially most of the wars were centered round between the Hindu kingdoms and new comer Muslim rulers, therefore, these compositions had community oriented psychological boost. One hand they aimed to glorify the heroism of Hindu warriors and other hand also reflected a sense of Hindu solidarity against Muslim power¹⁰. In that case, we can assess the work of Malik Muhammed Jaisi as instance. In the writing of Jaisi one notion of Hindu crisis may be identified. Alauddin khalji was held responsible for Chittors fall because of his only goal to gain Padmavati, the rumor centric pretty Queen of Chittor. In contrary to this fact he also tried to evolve the ideal Hindu women figure of Padmavati who presumably performed 'Jauhar' rite to protect her self-honor. Jaisi himself used to live in Hindu atmosphere and individually attached with both Sufi and Bhakti mystic perception. As human being is bounded by diverse sociological norms, so it was natural to Jaisi to symbolize Hindu regeneration through his compositions. The things I am going to remark here is that both Hindu and Muslim nationalist historians, including the left liberal scholars never examine these sources properly to reconstruct a true incident.

There are so many allegations arising now a days about the distortion of medieval Indian history by the Marxist school. Partly, this objection should not be reluctant. Although, Marxists as a dominant school still continuing their intellectual discourse in each and every aspects of Indian history, but regarding medieval period few noticeable matters should not be overlooked. Temple destruction was one of the most sensitive issue during this period of study, probably there might have numerous reasons behind it, mostly the emphasize has given by both Muslim nationalist as well as the Marxists that temple had been demolished due to military campaign and there was no objective of Muslim monarchs to hurt the Hindu religion. Simultaneously, religious conversion considered to be happened through moderate process but there was, of course, the promulgation of forceful conversion by different medieval rulers like Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq who openly claimed towards the non-Muslims to embrace into Islam for better benefits and livelihood in Muslim state. Such factors the Marxists has analyzed on the ground of economy. Whether directly or indirectly for several purpose of religion or the nature of medieval state these scholars intentionally wanted to avoid those facts which is indeed a threat to historical objectivity.

Conclusion:

Historical study changes in time after time where approaches are coming and going, probably this is the nature of this dominant disciple of social science. Now a days we are reaching into a broad platform of interdisciplinary aspects. But the deficiency of unbiased wittings is inadequate which may be a difficult task because we born and brought up as human being, where materially we have to deal with number of social, political and religious orders. In this respect, one cannot be impartial in authorship that's the cruel reality, but as a historiographer one can do the best exertion to reach in the appropriation of authenticity. It's the responsibility of social scientists to differentiate truth from every kind of fiction and psychological sway, otherwise there is no possibility to restore the human past on the basis scientific methodological perception.

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