

A Study on Religious Practices and Traditions on Muslim Historians in Saltanta Age

Abstract

During the 20th century studies on religious practices and traditions of the early Turkish rule have made sufficient headway, in spite of the limited scope and availability of contemporary source materials. The study of medieval Islam as a religion with a total impact on Hindustan was not wholly neglected by 20th century historians even when, as during the first forty years of this century, narrative political history dominated modern historiography on medieval India. In the early 20th century, Thomas Arnold, Murray Titus, Mohammad Wahid Mirza and nearer independence and partition, Mohammad Habib, A.B.M. Habibullah and K.A. Nizami have directed their attention to the religious aspects of the Muslim 'presence' in India. But it would not be unfair to say that their contributions, however important individually, did not control the main thrust and the direction of historical works on medieval India before 1947. Their works did not have any appreciable effect upon the forms, technique and scope of such standard general histories as the Oxford History of India (London, 1919); The Cambridge History of India, Volume-III, (Cambridge, 1928) and Ishwari Prasad's History of Medieval India (1925).

Keywords: Mohammad Habib, A.B.M. Habibullah, K.A. Nizami.

Introduction

Writing at a time when 'hindu-Muslim' conflict and a narrative of the wars, diplomacy, and administration of the different Sultans of Delhi were the main features of Sultanate historiography, Mohammad Habib's foregrounding of larger social and economic changes in the history of Indian society seemed to challenge the manner in which the 13th century was interpreted. But, in fact, in at least three interrelated points, Habib's contribution left the field undisturbed. The first concerned the disparate body of immigrant's feelings into India from Afghanistan, eastern Iran, and Transoxiana. In the historiography of the Delhi Sultanate these immigrants, collectively and individually, were always described as 'Muslims', as part of a larger, monolithic community.¹ Habib paid little attention to the denominational background of immigrants into India, and he did not argue that Muslim social and political identities were formed by a shared urban culture within which occupational and class differences were important. But, having said that, Habib provided a brief historical survey of Islamic ideologies that bound Muslims together through a shared past.² As a result, despite his attempts at historicization, Habib understands of the Muslim community stresses its underlying principles, resulting at bottom in an essentialization that did little to disturb interpretations of Muslim society as singular or monolithic.

Aim of the Study

In the pre-independence era and after partitions, the rise of Hindu nationalist historians and Muslim Indian historians started offering different interpretations to some of the religious issues during the rule of Muslim in medieval times. Western scholars such as Peter Hardy, Simon Digby, Bruce Lawrence, and Carl Ernst also discussed some of the issues pertaining to the religious conditions during the medieval times. These historians have either conformed to the basic premises put forward by Mohammad Habib or have added to their refinements and important inputs. Muslim writer deeply study of the early Turkish period for religious practices and traditions. So Muslim Indian writer research fact present society.

The second assumption widely prevalent amongst scholars concerned the history of the 'Muslim community', which they believed could

Krishan Kumar
Assistant Professor,
Deptt.of History,
M.M. (P.G.) College,
Fatehabad, Haryana

only be charted through the history of the 'Muslim Sultanate', these two not merely merged into a monolith, but were also congruent. At once extreme this led to the argument that the iconoclastic, militaristic character of Islam and Muslims determined the nature of the Sultanate and its rulers; these were regarded as positive or negative attributes, depending upon who was narrating the history. At the other extreme, it led to the production of histories by secular minded and progressive historians such as Mohammad Habib who saw in the arrival of Islam and the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate the appearance of new ideologies and modes of production that transformed society and politics in India for the better.³ Since these ideas were 'foreign' to 'Hindu' society, their novelty could only be grasped through the early history of 'Islamic' state formations in the Arabian Peninsula, Iran and Transoxiana. That was the collective pre-history of Muslims in India, and it needed the Delhi Sultanate to create the social and political preconditions for the import of these new into the subcontinent. Even while Habib argued for the distance between the religion of Islam and its political manifestation, the history of the Muslim community in India could not be told without the context of an Islamic state. Thus, the paradox: while Chishti saints abhorred service with the state because of its materialistic, hierarchical attributes, this same state challenged the caste-based stratifications of Hindu society. Nor was the urban character of Muslim society entirely accidental: the towns were the centers of religious training and culture. They were also its major centres of production. And they flourished because they received State patronage and were the hub of Sultanate government and economy.⁴ The third assumption concerned the other face of the Muslim state: an undifferentiated 'Hindu' subject population. For a large number of historians the seizure of Delhi by 'Muslims' marked the beginning of a period when 'indigenes' were ranged in opposition to 'foreign' invaders: a 'Hindu' community juxtaposed and in conflict with the 'Muslim'. A.B.M. Habibullah worked this theme with complete confidence into his text: the only threat to the 'foundation of Muslim rule in India' was occasioned by 'Hindu aggression'. In Mohammad Habib's formulation the Muslim-hindu divide operated at the level of social organizations: one was casteist and hierarchical, the other was egalitarian. Just as normative juridical and hagiographical texts had enlarged on the qualities of Muslim society, Al-Beruni and the Manu Smriti summarized the features of 'Hindu' society. Caste differences in 'Hindu' society implied differing reactions to the Muslim Delhi Sultanate; the low castes, first in the towns and then in the countryside, saw the Muslim Sultanate as a liberating force, while the upper castes, the rulers, and the rich peasantry had to be destroyed by 'Ala' al-Din Khalaji⁵. The differing responses of 'Hindus' to the Sultanate notwithstanding, the nature of the conflict between the two was built into the supposedly compelling logic of antithetical Hindu and Muslim social structures. I.H. Qureshi's book emphasizes Islamic character of the Delhi Sultanate.⁶ He seems to be proud of the political achievements of Muslims in

medieval India and believes that they more than satisfied modern ideas of tolerance, benevolence and efficiency. Qureshi's approach is strongly communist, writes Peter Hardy. Qureshi treats the Delhi Sultanate as a welfare state, the Muslim community in medieval India as a nation, and the Sultans of Delhi as Muslims in both a religious and a political sense. I.H. Qureshi in the Chapter eleven entitled, 'the spirit of the Government' (pp. 204-214) claims that, the Hindu population was better off under the Muslims than under Hindu tributaries or under independent rulers...Nor was the Hindu despised socially. The Muslims, generally speaking, have been remarkably free from racial prejudice. There are instances of Muslim nobles marrying Hindu maidens; of free intercourse between Muslim saints and Hindu yogis; of Hindu followers of Muslim saints and vice-versa...it was Hinduism which protected itself beneath the strong armor of exclusiveness. The Muslim was unclean; his very touch polluted the food of the twice-born Brahman and men of the higher castes; the new-comer was outside the pale. I.H. Qureshi's monograph, the Muslim community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610-1947 A.D.) traces the history of Islam in India from the times of Arab traders till the partition of India. In his work, I.H. Qureshi tried to trace the background that Muslim community in India survived as Muslim community in India survived as a separate entity from the beginning the partition of India was inevitable. He tried to highlight the progress made by Islam in India under the chapters entitled, Islam enters the sub-continent, Islam gains a foothold in the north-west, Islam spreads into other areas etc. till a separate nation of Pakistan was formed in 1947 A.D.¹² In assessment of his work, it appears that he was involved in charting the history of the origin of the Pakistan state, not the development of Islam in Indian sub-continent. I.H. Qureshi say, it was mostly through men of learning who kept themselves in touch with the intellectual and religious developments in the rest of the Muslim world and through the sufis that Islam maintained its cosmopolitan and international character⁷ He described the missionary activities of Sufi saints and other missionaries like Mulla Ali, Imam Shah, Baba Raihan and Chisti and Suhrawardi Sufi saints. He writes, the Sufis did not compromise with Hindu beliefs and customs; they did not adopt the Ismaili technique of gradual conversion, but they were not totally unwilling to take account of human psychology. He further adds that not all the Muslims of the subcontinent are of native blood but substantial elements are of foreign origin. The exact percentage of families of foreign origin and of those who still betray foreign racial characteristics is difficult to assess, but it cannot be denied that they form a considerable element in the Muslim population, and one whose importance has not found recognition in the writings of British scholars.⁸ Writing on Hindu-Muslim Relations and Fusion of Hindu-muslim ideas and practices, A. Rashid in his book, Society and Culture in Medieval India (1206-1526 A.D.) believes that the medieval chroniclers are responsible for the attitude of some modern scholars towards the

problem of Hindu-Muslim relations. He observes that the chroniclers would have us believe that the Muslim conquerors were good Muslims because their primary aim and motive in the wars and conquests were religious rather than political.

There is no dearth of scholarly studies and other writings touching upon 'Sufi' ideas and 'Malfuzat' literature. These themes representing diverse points of view, both in English and Urdu remained focus of 20th century historians. However, the towering corpus of studies which had a definitive bearing on the writings of the last few decades and which contuse to be the paradigm of further studies is undoubtedly the one penned by Mohammad Habib. One such work is his 'early Muslim mysticism', which was presented as an extension lecture, delivered at Visva-Bharati in 1935 at the invitation of Rabindranath Tagore. It was first published in the Vidyapeetha Commemoration Volume, pp. 42-83 and subsequently printed in his collected works titled, *Politics and Society During the Early Medieval Period*, edited by K.A. Nizami (New Delhi, 1974, Vol. 1, pp. 235-285). Mohammad Habib's *Hazrat Amir Khusraw of Delhi* (Aligarh, 1927) and *Shaikh Nasiruddin Chiragh of Delhi* (Aligarh, 1946) throw a flood of light on Sufi mysticism in medieval times. K.A. Nizami followed Mohammad Habib in his studies of medieval mysticism and penned down three monographs, (i) *Life and Times of Shaikh Fairduddin Gang-i-Shakar* (Aligarh, 1955), (ii) *Studies in Medieval Indian History* (Aligarh, 1956) and (iii) *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth century* (Aligarh, 1961). In the latter book, he discussed the nature of rule and conditions of Hindus under the Sultanate pertaining to Simon Digby, Carl Ernst, Bruce B. Lawrence, Richard M. Eaton, *Riad-ul Islam* and others have either conformed to Mohammad Habib's basic premises or have added to their refinements and important inputs. Indeed, a large part of the conventional historiography on mysticism shares an empiricist bent also present in political history; whether it was Mohammad Habib weeding out 'genuine' from 'fabricated' records of conversations between mystic saints, malfuzat, or P.M. Currie searching for the historical *Mu'in alODin Chisti*.⁹ But over the last few years mystic records-both malfuzat and biographical encyclopedias or *tazkirat* (singular, *tazkira*) started to be read more carefully for their rhetorical significance.

The work of Carl Ernst and, more recently, Bruce Lawrence, has paid attention to the stylistic form, content, and narrative intent of sufi texts to show how important they were in the 'historiographical' approach to the sources, Ernst also emphasized the need for a micro-study, 'an intensive study of a tightly circumscribed field', to better grapple with the several perspective of different accounts from a central location. K.A. Nizami's *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* deals with the Sufis of the Delhi Sultanate.

The organization and activities of the Suhrawardi and Chishti Silsilas are contrasted. It is however an important work, the most considerable on the period to be published for a number of years, and

it breaks much fresh ground. It is not the least of the achievements of the Aligarh school of historians that are at last freed from the tyrannous and narrow vision of earlier indo-Muslim history imposed by Elliott and Dowson.

Many of Habib's insights regarding the Sufis were never theorized sufficiently in his larger arguments and were, therefore, completely missed by later generations of scholars, Habib noted, "the Silsilahs quarreled with each other, there was no co-ordination even between the Shaikhas of the same Silsilah, who-acted independently and often appointed rival successors to the same territory".¹⁰ These observations escaped the attention of his principle colleague, K.A. Nizami who wrote extensively on the Sufis. Decades later, quite independently, Simon Digby focused upon these questions in his paper "Tabarrukat and Succession among the Great Chishti Shaykhs of Delhi Sultanate" (R.E. Frykenberg, (Ed.), *Delhi Through the Ages*, Delhi, 1986, pp. 63-103). These observations aside, additional it is to be borne in mind that Habib also argued rather naively for the veracity of Al-Beruni's reportage on the nature of Hindu society. *Riaz-ul Islam's Sufism in South Asia: Impact on 14th Century Muslim Society*, (Karachi, 2002) and *Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence's Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond*, (London, 2002) are the latest important works that not only encompass the earlier questions raised in the study of Sufism but also new questions and set out important paradigms. Few professional historians have engaged with the issue of temple destruction or iconoclasm, even though it is a properly historical one. It's difficult to assess why K.A. Nizami in his monograph, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics During the Thirteenth Century*, did not offers an explanation of the issue of temple destruction in much details. It appears that Nizami did not considered unwelcome evidence as in his remarks on the destruction of Hindu temples on page 320 the famous inscription at the *Quwwat-ul-Islam Masjid* (recording the despoiling of 27 Hindu and Jain temples) finds no mention. Instead, Weberian essentializations received a fresh lease of life in Andre Wink's work, where an 'Islamic theology of iconoclasm' explained temple destruction in India under the Muslim Sultans.¹¹ During the two centuries before 1192, which was when an indigenous Indo-Muslim state and community first appeared in north India, Persianized Turks systematically raided and looted major urban centers of South Asia, sacking temples and hauling immense loads of movable property to power bases in eastern Afghanistan.

The coming of Islam in India and its various facets in Indian subcontinent had attracted the attention of scholars from the beginning of Indological studies. It appears that the early British historians studies the religious practice and traditions of Islam in India with keeping different objectives, some for intellectual thrust, some for individual urge, and others for political and administrative purposes. Hindu-Muslim relations remained the core issues of studies on Delhi Sultanate. In the period, when India was under British rule, it was highlighted by the British

administrative historians that during medieval times there was no synthesis of Hindu Muslim communities. This was justified by quoting examples of forceful conversion, temple desecration and unharmonious relationship between these two communities. Indian nationalist historians adopted totally contrast picture and focused on Indo-Islamic fusion and mingling of two religions. On the other hand modern Muslim Indian historians stressed on the interpretation of Sufi Islam and resisted the fundamentalist picture of Islam as projected by British scholars. Modern researches after independence, based on new contemporary evidences and more sources highlighted that there was no animosity between two communities and these are modern constructs to facilitate politics.

Conclusion

The contributions of historians like Mohammad Habib, Jadunath Sarkar, Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, Simon Digby, Sidney Toy, Burton-Page, Peter Jackson, Andre Wink, Iqtidar Alam Khan, I.H. Siddiqui and Irfan Habib, while charting the progress of Muslim arms during the early Turkish rule opened new avenues. Deficiency of contemporary Hindu narrative sources and vague references in the Hindu inscriptions are few hindrances in proper understanding of the military history of the early Turkish Empire. Muslim writers on the early Turkish rule provide fragmental data and use misleading terminology. Although there is an abundance of information on military events, there is hardly any insight into the most relevant details concerning, for example, weaponry, tactics, or logistics. Indeed, most of the Indo-Persian texts present literary and normative models rather than trustworthy descriptions of the events that matter. For example, much of the official Indo-Persian works teem not only with excessive violence towards the enemy but also with

boundless love and praise for the ally. At best, we know which battle took place at what moment and who was involved for what reason but we are kept more or less ignorant about how exactly these numerous battles and sieges took place. We have to move patiently, to read all the well and lesser-known Indo-Islamic *tawarikh* and *fathnamas* and to collect and compare all the relevant military data so far ignored. We would have to start and move with the right questions, interpretations and would have to take closer look at what has been achieved so far in the field of historiography. A monograph is in wanting on the military system of the early Delhi Sultans which would discuss some of these important issues and form a consensus among historians about the 13th century military activities.

References

1. Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the India Environment*, PP 50-56, Oxford, 1964.
2. Mohammad Habib, "Introduction to Elliot and Dowson", *History of India as Told by its own Historians* PP 95-100, New Delhi, 1990
3. James Mill, *The History of British India*, PP 66-72, New Delhi 1817-18.
4. Mohammad Habib, *OP. Cit.* PP. 36,43,74-80.
5. *Ibid*, P 71-80.
6. I.H. Qureshi, *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, PP 60-64, Lahore, 1942.
7. *Ibid*, P. 66.
8. *Ibid* P. 86.
9. Mohammad Habib, *Chishti Mystics Records of the Sultanate Period*, M.I. Q. Vol-I, PP. 1-42, 1950.
10. Mohammad Habib. *OP. Cit.* P. 56.
11. Andre Wink, *al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*. PP 294-333, Leiden Brill Publishers, 1997