

Colonial Scholars, Persian Historiographical Sources: Translations and Past India

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Received: 2012/6/21

Accepted:2014/6/14

Abstract

The importance or centrality of Persian histories (whether imperial, regional or universal) can be gauged from the deep reliance placed by British historians on them for their own understanding of India's past. The examples are numerous: Dow, Erskine, Elliot and Dowson explored Persian sources for their writings. Stewart also based his *History of Bengal* mainly on Persian materials; Mill did not know Persian and so wrote his *History of India* from Persian sources translated into English. Marshman used published English translations of Persian texts in the compilation of his *History of Bengal*. Hunter also depended for his understanding of the insight into the history of Muslim rule in Bengal on Persian source materials translated for him into English. Elphinstone, Thomas, Wheeler, Keene, Blochmann and Berveridge were all good Persian scholars and used, in addition to Persian sources, coins, inscriptions and archaeological finding for

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their writings can be fitted with this group. The recent work of Kumkum Chatterjee alerts us to the twin activities of British scholars and historians: translating Persian histories, as well as writing new histories of India based on the already established Persian model. The former indicates a serious engagement of colonial scholars with older models of history writing (as the appreciation heaped on the *A'in* as a historical source in the preface to its published edition indicates); the latter proves the adage that imitation was indeed, in this context, a form of flattery, however unintended.

Keywords: Persian Historiography; Colonial Historiography; Colonization; History and Past; Indo-Persian Culture.

1.Introduction

The Indo-Persian historiography had a long and rich history prior to the coming of the East India Company. Our main concern is with the impact of colonial rule on this genre of history writing. Before discussing the theme article with reference to Indo-Persian historiography, it is relevant to introduce some landmark texts of this genre that were written

in medieval India. The works discussed below are the ones that were considered important by the British for understanding Indian history, and were thus printed by the government or private individuals with this objective.

The earliest Persian historical works in India date back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and were written in the Delhi

Sultanate. Although Al Biruni's famous treatise on India was written in Arabic, it represents the earliest major work produced by a Persian scholar in India. Historians of Delhi Sultanate such as Minhaj-us Siraj Juzjani (*Tabaqat-i Nasiri*) and Zia-uddin Barni (*Tarikh-i Firozshahi* and *Fatawa –i Jahandari*) modeled their works of those written in the Perso-Islamic world. After a brief period of decline coinciding with Timur's invasion of India and the period of the Afghan-Lodi dynasty, the rich tradition of history writing was revived during the Mughal period. History was one of many genres in which books were written; the others included autobiography, collections of poetry, ethical treatises, belles-letters, manuals of technical prose and administration, conversational discourses, and advice literature (*diwans, akhlaq, insha, malfuzat, nasihat*), biographical dictionaries

(*tazkira*), and, of course, political histories. There was also a rich corpus of literature on themes relating to religion.

The Mughal emperor Akbar was both the subject and the patron of many Persian-language texts. Akbar's translation projects spanned many languages: the one hand, he had his grandfather Babur's memoirs translated from Turkish to Persian, while on the other hand he also commissioned the translation of many Sanskrit texts into Persian. These include the Persian translation of the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, prepared by 'Abd-ul Qadir Badauni with the assistance of a team of Sanskrit scholars in 1584. Composed in Persian, Ab-ul Fazl's *Akbar nama* and *A'in-i Akbari* are the most important, the latter indeed being unique, texts for understanding history and institutions of the Empire Mughal. The *A'in-i Akbari*,

an elaborate gazetteer, is fundamental for all studies on the administration of the Mughal Empire. The most important of the court or official histories of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan's reign, is that of Abd-ul Hamid Lahori's who wrote *Padshah Nama*. Texts produced in a later period, such as *Alamgir Nama* by Mahammad Kazim Amin and *Muntakhab-ul Lubab* by Khafi Khan were also important representatives of the genre of traditional narrative history. The rendition of Indo-Persian historiography continued throughout the eighteenth century. The *Siyar-ul Mutakharin*, authored by Ghulam Ali Azad Husaini Bilgrami who served both Emperor Shah Alam and the British is a critical analysis of British policy in Bengal in the eighteenth century. Many of the prose and verse works devoted to the emperors are simply continuation of

the narrative and panegyric conventions of earlier periods, except that the events they describe reflect the precipitated deterioration of the empire during the first four decades of the eighteenth century.¹

Translation has often been characterized as a 'central act' of European imperialism. Tejaswini Niranjana has suggested that the practice of translation shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relationships of power that operate under colonialism.² Translation was deployed in different kinds of discourses—philosophy, historiography, education—to renew and perpetuate colonial domination.³ She has also stated that through translation, the colonized were

1. See, Stephan F. Dale, 'Indo-Persian Historiography', *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Online Edition, www.iranicaonline.org.

2. Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Colonialism and the Aesthetics of Translation' in, *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India*, eds., Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sudhir and Vivek Dhareshwar, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1993, p.319.

3. *Ibid*, p. 321.

represented in a manner that justified colonial domination. She states that translation 'fixes' colonized cultures, and makes them unchanging.⁴ It is the opinion of Michael Dodson that translation made available legal-cultural information for the administration and rule of the non-west. He argues that its importance lay in that it provided resources for the construction and representation of the colonized as 'Europe's civilizational other'. In his opinion, translation was 'a strategic means for representing "otherness" to primarily domestic British reading audiences'.⁵

In order to examine the views of Niranjana and Dodson in the context of Persian sources, it will be useful to discuss some early printed works that were English translations of Persian texts. Examples of such

translated works include Francis Gladwin's *Transactions in Bengal* which was translated from the Persian *Tawarikh-i Bangala* and published in Calcutta in 1788 and Haji Mustafa's translation of *Siyar-ul Mut'akharin* (Calcutta, 1786).⁶ Similarly, Charles Stewart devoted his time to the translation of Persian texts into English. Out of this project came *The History of Bengal* written from a study of Persian sources and published European works.⁷ In this work, Stewart used fourteen Persian manuscripts, of which twelve were from Tipu Sultan's library.⁸

The preface of books translated from Persian to English usually contains the aims with which they were published in addition to the information about the translator, place of publication, etc. The preface, therefore, is a useful source

4. Niranjana, *Sitting Translation*, p.2.

5. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and national Culture India 1770-1880*, p. 118.

6. Hussain, *Study of Nineteenth Century Historical Works on Muslim Rule in Bengal*, p.13.

7. *Ibid*, p.18

8. *Ibid*, p. 21.

for studying the objective and strategy of translation as well as their implications for the colonial rule and the print culture. Here we will examine some of these prefaces with a view to interrogating the text as well as the motivation underlying its production. We must note that many of the translated works were in fact regional histories or biographies of regional rulers.

In 1842 Colonel W. Miles of the East India Company translated and published a Persian book under the title *The History of Hydur Naik, otherwise styled Shums ul Moolk, Ameer ud Dowla, Nawab Hudur Ali Khan Bahadoor, Hudur Jung, Nawab of the Karnatic Balaghut[sic]/ The History of Haydir Naik, otherwise styled Shams-ul Molk, Amir-ud Dowla Nawab Haydir Ali khan Bahadur, Haydir Jang, Nawab of the Karzatic Balagat*. This translation was based on a work originally

written by Mir Husain Ali Khan Kirmani, and the translation was funded by the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland. In his preface to the printed book, Colonel Miles wrote about the problems he had faced during translating the work on account of the specific characteristics of the Persian language. As he put it,

The Persian Language, as any one at all acquainted with it is aware, delights in inflated description, pompous imagery, sounding epithets, and in all extravagant figures; and according to the character of the writer, this genius or affectation of the language is frequently carried to the verge of absurdity— that is, absurdity as measured by our scale. To suppress or soften these peculiarities when very wild, and retain them when deserving to be kept, is I think, indispensable, and in my translation

of this work, I have tried hard to conform to this rule, although I may not perhaps have always succeeded in my endeavour.

Thus, the author stated his intention to produce a translation as faithful to the original as possible. Colonel Miles also indicated that although he was aware of other works on the history of Mysore by English and French writers, he would not be including them in his translation, as 'still we have never seen what those two individuals, or any of their nation, have said of themselves; if we except a portion, and that I believe a small one, of Tipu's letters, translated by the late Colonel Kirkpatrick.' He further compared English histories with the Persian one by stating that their concerns and perspective were entirely different.

For these reasons, I have thought it best to allow Hydur [sic]/ Haydir's

historian to tell his tale without comment. This account, compared with those above mentioned, will, it may be presumed, furnish a tolerably fair guide for the general historian. There is, however, only a partial resemblance between the English histories of the wars in the Karnatic and this; only a small part of this relating to the English wars, while, on the contrary, the English histories contain very little else.

Colonel Miles' preface is a good example of a translation that was done in order to allow 'native' historians to speak in their own voice. His ideas about the importance of reading a Persian history for a period for which many English and French histories were also available, indicates the esteem in which he held Persian historiographical traditions.

In 1786, Captain Jonathan Scott (who served the East India Company

and also functioned as private personal translator to Warren Hastings) published in London his translation from Persian into English of *The Memoirs of Eradat Khan*[sic]/ *The memories of Eradat Khan*, who he described as a 'nobleman of Hindostan'. The memoir was said to contain interesting anecdotes about Aurangzeb and his successors Shah Alam and Jahandar Shah, in which these one could find 'the causes of the very precipitate decline of the Mogul Empire in India.' Thus, the very fact that such a work was translated by an employee of the East India company indicates the concern that company had with the Mughal past of India. As Kumkum Chatterjee has indicated, British accounts of the collapse of the Mughal Empire depended heavily on Persian sources such as this one. Thus, while some British authors were writing histories of India in English, these histories

were based on Persian texts produced in India, and translated in to English by yet other British scholars.

Translations of texts were done also to identify and study such ethnic groups as were considered useful for colonial administration. Major J. Browne translated into English a work on the orders of the Directors of the East India Company that was printed in London in 1788. Browne indicated in the preface that he had served as the English minister at the court of Shah Alam, and in that period had acquired considerable knowledge of states bordering Agra and Delhi. He had met two Hindu residents of Lahore who possessed an account of the rise of the Sikhs written in Nagri character and also acquired an abridged Persian translation of this text from them, which he then rendered into English. Addressing the court of Directors, he

emphasized that he was convinced that ‘the rapid progress of this sect, will hereafter render a knowledge of them, their strength, and government, very important to the administration of Bengal.’⁹ Thus, the history of one part of India was seen to be an important example for the rest of the country. This book provides an example of a translation twice removed from the original. What had once been a manuscript was transformed after translation into a printed text that could be circulated much more widely, and thus made more accessible. Thus, translation and printing worked in tandem to disseminate ‘useful’ texts more widely.

Yet another work entitled *British India Analyzed: The Provincial and Revenue Establishments of*

9. Major J. Browne, *India Tracts: Containing a Description of the Jungle Terry Districts, Their Revenue, Trade, and Government: With a Plan for the Improvement of Them, Also an History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks*, London, 1788, p. iii.

Tippoo[Tipu] Sultaun and of Mahomedan and British Conquerors in Hindostan [sic] was printed in London in 1793 in three parts. One part, originally published in Calcutta in 1792, was titled *The Mysorean Revenue Regulations* and translated by Burrish Crisp. In the advertisement for the book, it was stated that the original belonged to Colonel John Murray who acquired it during the Coimbatore campaign, and the book was important as it was the ‘most accurate delineation of the modern Mahomedan government that has appeared’. The translator also expressed his gratitude to Colonel John Murray while expressing his disappointment at not being able to find reliable people in Calcutta to translate Malabar dialects or to explain provincial terms. He was thus forced to explain the terms from context, and apologized for the errors that may have crept in. This

episode indicates the dependence of British translators on native informants for information about term etc. When such a native informant could not be found (for a language other than Persian, as in this example), the work necessarily suffered.

The Life of Hafiz ool Moolk[sic]/ *The life of Hafiz-ul Molk*, was the translation of the biography of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, Nawab of Rohilkhand, was a book written by his son, Nawab Mustajab Khan Bahadur titled *Gulistan-i Rahmat*. It was abridged and translated by Charles Elliott in 1831 and printed in London. In his introduction to the work, Elliott stated that he had omitted many trivial episodes from the original. These omissions included

...the repeated encomiums lavished by the Nuwab[Nawab] on the generosity and intrepidity of his

lamented parent, though honourable to his feelings as a son, would be deemed extravagant by the generality of readers, and indeed would scarcely admit of translation.

Elliott also provided the reason for translating the book. According to him, the Nawab's memory in Rohilkhand was 'held in the highest veneration' and he had a distinguished career for over thirty years, and that his life 'may furnish some materials to aid in the compilation of a history of that period: and with this view, I have taken considerable pains to correct some chronological errors in the original.' Thus, we get a sense of the translator in this case not only deciding which work should be translated and why (thereby acting as a 'filter'), but also deciding which episodes were trivial and did not deserve to be translated. Elliott also told the reader that his translation

would be at variance with Hamilton's *History of the Rohillas* as Hamilton obtained his information from the Nawab of Awadh, who was, of course, a rival of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, and because 'as that work was published about the time of Mr. Hastings's trial, it might have been intended to frame an excuse for his permitting a British army to join in the attack on Hafiz in 1774.'

A slightly later work was *Mirat-i Ahmadi*, also regional history, which was written in Persian by the revenue minister of Gujarat, Ali Muhammad Khan. It was partially translated into English, annotated and introduced by James Bird, and published in London in 1835. Bird provided the rationale for the English translation of the work by stating that it had been done so that Europeans would understand 'Asiatics' better, and come to

possess an accurate as well as comprehensive knowledge of their way of life:

Though the acquirement of these, and the cultivation of oriental literature, may be of use, in enlarging our views of general history and geography, they serve a yet more important purpose, in this country, by removing the prejudices of early education, by interesting the feelings of Europeans for the welfare of Asiatics, and disposing the former to treat as equals those whom they had been taught to consider as inferiors....It is incumbent on us, as rulers of India, to possess an accurate knowledge of its customs, manners, religious opinions, history, and commerce; and regarding the early state of such there is yet a wide field of interesting research. The influence of the Greek kingdom of Bactria on Sanskrit literature; the knowledge which the Romans

possessed of India, and the state of their commerce with the country; the intercourse of the primitive Arabs and eastern Christians with the Hindús; the incorporation of foreign tribes with the aborigines; the institutions of their civil society; and rules of their military policy, are subjects of intense interest, that may be successfully elucidated by closely studying the Greek and Roman authors, in connexion [sic] with Sanskrit literature, and the historical and geographical books in Arabic and Persian.¹⁰

Bird also emphasized the unique nature of his recovery of the text via translation by stating that no manuscript copy of this particular work could be found in Europe. He acknowledged the help he received in translating the book from a Persian *munshi* by the name of Mir

10. Ali Muhammad Khan, *The Political and Statistical History of Gujarat: To Which Are Added, Copious Annotations, And A Historical Introduction*, tr., James Bird, London, 1835, p.iii.

Khairat Ali 'Mushtaq'.¹¹ Thus, the history of this one book ties features the many motifs that we have been tracing: the Orientalist obsession with knowledge that was as accurate as it was comprehensive, and the role of Indian informants in the production of colonial knowledge, the popularizing of a book by the event of its translation and publishing (even though it entered the English, and not Persian print culture). We now move on to the uses to which these translated and printed Persian works were put.

2. Usage of Persian Historical Sources in Making Past

Just as written histories were an important source for the expansion of knowledge, so were they relevant for identity formation. While ancient

11. *Ibid*, Preface, p.1. Bird appreciated his assistant by saying that had he lived in other times than ours, and under a different system, he would, in consideration of his knowledge of the Persian language and of Mohammedan history, have risen to offices of great rank and emolument.

Indian history provided an ideal of excellence, medieval history compelled scholars writing in Hindi to grapple with a more painful and problematic past: a past that was, according to their narrative, full of decadence, defeat, division, and subjection.¹² For Orsini, early colonialist histories from the outset signified the power of the colonial state and its agents to appropriate (through translation and subsequent interpretation and judgment) India's past, clear away the undergrowth of mythology, and to create in the cleared space, a proper 'scientific' history that was aimed at helping them to govern India and presenting to its Indian subject-hitherto a people without history- a proper account of their past, crafted on the basis of scientific evidence and reason (the tools of the enlightenment scholar). In the

12. Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940*, p. 507.

nineteenth century, the fragmented field of history was partly transformed and unified by orientalist and by the shift from court, sect, and family to print and the public sphere.¹³ Persian histories were therefore translated to function as part of this project.

Partha Chatterjee had argued that British historians put forward a theory of medieval decline that corresponded to their belief that Muslim rule in India was a period of despotism, misrule and anarchy, and therefore the British were required to amend matters.¹⁴ As a result, for Indian nationalists too ancient India became the classical age, while the period between the ancient and the contemporary was the dark age of medievalism. Chatterjee argues that this pattern was supported by European historiography. Just as

13. *Ibid*, p. 178.

14. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994, p.101.

Europeans were proud of Greek classical heritage, so were English educated Bengalis of Vedic civilization.¹⁵ Chatterjee discussed how Persian sources could be available through British writers' mediation for a people supposedly devoid of historical consciousness. However, Chatterjee's arguments in this case seem to be overstated. Some accounts written by the British, such as that of Sleeman, praised the Mughal state. A landmark in later British historiography on Muslim rule in India, Mountstuart Elphinstone's *The History of India: The Hindu and Mahomedan Periods*, published in 1841, contained a favourable account of Hindu civilization in the pre-Muslim era *as well as* about the prosperous and well-governed epoch of Muslim history under Akbar and Shah Jahan. This book became

popular in Indian Universities; after 1857, when it was translated into Persian, it achieved a wider circulation.¹⁶

Chatterjee's point about the constructs of colonial historiography has been reiterated by Vasant Kaiwar taking ancient India as an example. According to Kaiwar even as British historians demonized Muslim rule in India, they glorified the ancient Indian past. The Aryan model of history in the nineteenth century had two main pillars, one Greek, the other Indian. British writers carried over the myth of the all-conquering Aryan peoples-or Aryan race, once racialist thought had established itself—from the realms of philosophy and religious studies into history and anthropology. In British histories, argues Kaiwar, there was a narrative of invaders, or migrants, who

15. *Ibid*, p.98.

16. Syed, *Muslim Response to the West*, p. 24.

brought technology, linguistic refinement, and philosophy from central Asia or southern Russia to the subcontinent and were, where necessary, fell free to employ techniques of ethnic cleansing against inferior races.¹⁷ The Aryan-Dravidian divide in India was posited as a racial divide between light-skinned northerners and dark-skinned southerners, with the former, naturally, superior and ever victorious. This, in turn, says Kaiwar, generated other myths about lower-caste people in north India, while those of South were termed as the aboriginal Dravidian people. Later historiography would turn Muslims into Aryan civilization's adversaries. Another enduring legacy of the Aryan model of history

is the division of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods (corresponding to the ancient, medieval, and modern periods of European history), established originally by British and later by nationalist historians. This division originally served a polemical purpose for the British, who claimed that they were in India to restore the glories of ancient India by liberating India from Muslim rule. Kaiwar terms the Aryan model of history as an attempt to write world history keeping race at the centre-stage.¹⁸

A deeper insight into the process by which Western knowledge of the Orient is offered by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, who argues that the historiographical selection of certain Persian medieval court chronicles to reconstruct the Indian past played a strategic role in constituting 'the west' as the site of

17. Vasant Kaiwar, 'The Aryan Model of History and the Oriental Renaissance: The politics of Identity in an Age of Revolutions, Colonialism, and Nationalism', in *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation*, eds., Vasant Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar, Andrew E. Barnes, and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003, pp.30-31.

18. *Ibid*, pp.37-49.

progress and innovation and ‘the orient’ as the locus of backwardness and tradition. Targhi believes that in its early phase modern Oriental studies did not constitute a discourse of domination but reciprocal relation between European and Indian scholars. In this view he differs from the classic Saidian position of the colonial subject without agency. Targhi then traces the transformation of Orientalist inquiry into a discourse of western domination, which resulted in the obliteration of all traces of ‘Oriental’ agency, voice, writing, and creativity. Thus, his analysis is capable of plotting changes in the situation. The colonial subject was not entirely without agency; he had it, then lost it. This happened, according to him, with the rise of science in the eighteenth century, following which the contribution of non-European scholars was increasingly

marginalized and deemed nonobjective.¹⁹

In an earlier section, we have discussed the case of Persian books that were translated into English for a British audience. In keeping with this section’s focus on the uses of which history was put in the colonial set up in India, we will now consider some examples of English texts translated into Persian, this time for an Indian audience. It is relevant here to refer to a book that was translated from English to Persian in 1859 and published by the Baptist Mission Press. The book was John C. Marshman’s *History of India: From Remote Antiquity to the Accession of Mogul Dynasty* to which the translator Maulvi Abd-ur Rahim Gorakhpuri, gave the title *Tarikh-i Hindustan*. The translation was patronized by Md. Bahram Shah

19. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, ‘Orientalism’s Genesis Amnesia’ in *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation*, pp.103-106.

(Tipu Sultan's grandson) who dedicated it to the then Viceroy Lord Canning, stating that it had been translated in an 'easy and homely style, agreeably to the instructions of the under named, with profound respect and in fervent hope of meeting with His Excellency's benign approbation'. The book is in two parts and sixteen chapters: the first part (six chapters) is a general history of India, its geography, and history of Hindus generally. The second part has nine chapters and it is a description of the period from the beginning of Arab and Turkish rule in India till the arrival of the Portuguese. The last chapter is a separate treatment of the Portuguese. The translator stated that the book was an abridged version of the original as the bulky original was too tedious to read. He claimed that it would make readers aware about the events in Hindustan from the time of

'Hindu kings' till the arrival of the Portuguese. He also maintained that the ancient history of India was full of incorrect facts and myths as old documents had been destroyed. He said that although few histories of ancient India had been written in the Islamic period as well, it was under the British government that ancient history was well researched. The British wrote facts correctly about ancient India carefully, and they were continuing this work. In chapter sixteen, about the arrival of Portuguese to India, the translator wrote that they came to the Deccan under the Bahmanids and this marked the conquest of Hindustan by Christianity. After 200 years of Portuguese rule, the British were able to take over Hindustan and this was divine fate. They took Hindustan from Muslims in the same

way as Muslims were able to take it from the Hindus.²⁰

Persian was thus considered a suitable medium through which the Indian past was selected, interpreted and then transmitted to an Indian audience via British mediation. Indians were thus taught a version of their own history, in their own language. The same was the case with Urdu, which became another effective medium of transmitting the Indian past to students. *Tarikh-i Firishhta*, for example, was translated into Urdu and was being used as a textbook in the Delhi College for Arabic and Persian classes. In a study of colonial history textbooks in India, Powell states that most of the textbooks in the 1830s and 1840s, whether in English or Urdu, treated pre-tenth-century history as an ill-defined era preceding what was termed the ‘arrival of the

Ghaznavids’. The entire pre-tenth century was passed over rapidly and perfunctorily, mainly on the ground that it was not possible to distinguish ‘historical fact’ from ‘fable’ until the well-documented ‘Mohammedan era’.²¹

Many Urdu translations of Persian and English histories of India, mostly from the Delhi College press in the mid-1840s (not all of which were intended for school or college use) were published, which mostly neglected the pre-tenth century past. Among such regional and dynastic works may be included the Urdu translation, by a teacher called Nur Muhammad of the *Tarikh-i Mughaliya (History of the Mughals)*, which was taught in the Persian Department of the Delhi College from 1849 onwards. The same

20. Translation: Mehrdad Ramezannia.

21. Avril A. Powell, ‘History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-colonial past in North Western India in the 1860s and 1870s’, in *Invoking the Past: The Use of History in South Asia*, ed., Daud Ali, Oxford University Press., New Delhi, 1999, pp. 96-97.

teacher also translated the *Tarikh-i Bengal*, which was taught, among other places, in the science classes of Delhi College's 'Oriental' section from 1853 onwards.²²

The case of another history book, *Miftah-ul Tawarikh*, which was written by Thomas William Beale is equally interesting. It was first published by the Messenger Press Agra in 1849, and subscribed to by 28 British and 33 Indians. Later, the book was published again by Munshi Nawal Kishore in Kanpur in 1867. The title page mentioned that it was a collection of the most valuable chronograms in the Persian language, showing the exact year and date of the birth, deaths, etc. of Muslims kings, philosophers and their eminent men with historical observations, inscriptions on ancient buildings with other descriptions, from the commencement to 1265

hijri. These were said to be extracted from Persian histories and arranged in chronological order by the author. It was divided into thirteen sections. In the preface (*dibacha*) the author talked about the different kinds of histories – birth and death of Muhammad and ended with the arrival of the British.²³

Conclusion

Although most British historians were prejudiced against the medieval period, regarding it as degenerate, oppressive and backward, there were important exceptions to this rule too, the most prominent being the work of Monstuart Elphinstone, who praised the rule of Akbar and Shah Jahan. In their analysis of the past of Bengal, the British interpreted its history in terms of relations between communities made distinct by different, religiously based,

22. *Ibid*, p. 98.

23. *Miftah -ul Tawarikh*, Nawal Kishore, 1867. Translation; Mehrdad Ramezanniae.

civilizations. The importance or centrality of Persian histories as we tried had a deep influence on British historians for their own understanding of India's past. We can perceive two trends in the publication of Persian historical works. While court chronicles of the Mughal period were published for readers in Britain or for the use of British administrators in India, there was also a trend towards the publication of regional histories.

The English translation of Persian histories undertaken by colonial officials and scholars had important ramifications. Once a Persian text had been translated into English and printed, it underwent a double transformation: from manuscript (often privately owned) to a printed codex (for public distribution), and from a language unintelligible to many British administrators (Persian) to one with which they

were most familiar (English). The audience of the work thus expanded in these two very important ways. Colonial scholars were interested in the Mughal past in order to better pose as legitimate successors of the Mughals in India; they were interested in its decline so as to learn 'lessons' from the past, and presumably apply these so as to preempt the fall of the British one. Written historical records, specifically Persian ones, were therefore studied, translated, and published with one eye looking to the future and one to the past.

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پژوهشگران استعماری، منابع تاریخ‌نگاری فارسی: ترجمه و گذشته‌ی هند

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تاریخ پذیرش: ۹۲/۳/۲۴

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۱/۴/۱

اهمیت یا محوریت منابع تاریخ‌نگاری فارسی (اعم از امپراتوری / درباری، منطقه ای یا جهانی) را می‌توان از اعتماد عمیق مورخان انگلیسی از درک خودشان از گذشته‌ی هند در این منابع جست. نمونه‌ها فراوان است: دوو، ارسکین، الیوت، و داوسن منابع فارسی را برای نوشته‌هایشان مورد بررسی قرار دادند. استوارت کتابش «تاریخ بنگال» بر اساس منابع فارسی نگاشت. میل اگرچه فارسی نمی‌دانست ولی کتاب «تاریخ هند» اش را بر اساس منابع فارسی ترجمه شده به انگلیسی نوشت. ماسون متون فارسی چاپ شده به فارسی را برای تألیف کتاب «تاریخ بنگال» اش مورد استفاده قرار داد. هانت نیز در درکش درباره‌ی تاریخ مسلمانان هند به منابع فارسی وابسته بود. در پژوهش اخیر، محققین ما را از فعالیت‌های دوگانه‌ی محققین و مورخین انگلیسی: ترجمه‌ی منابع تاریخ فارسی، و همین‌طور نوشتن تاریخ جدید هند بر اساس قالب مرسوم درکتب فارسی پیشین، آگاه می‌سازند. پژوهشگران استعماری به گذشته‌ی تاریخ تیموریان هند، به عبارتی در بهتر موقعیت قراردادن خود به موجب منابع معتبر تیموریان در هندوستان علاقه‌مند بودند. بنابراین، اسناد تاریخی ثبت‌شده، خصوصاً منابع فارسی، مورد مطالعه، ترجمه، و انتشار - با نگاهی به آینده از طریق گذشته - قرار گرفتند. مقاله به پیوند بهره‌گیری این منابع توسط محققین استعماری در تبیین گذشته‌ی هند (تاریخ‌نگاری استعماری) می‌پردازد.

واژگان کلیدی: تاریخ‌نگاری فارسی، تاریخ‌نگاری استعماری، استعمارگرایی، تاریخ و گذشته، فرهنگ هند و ایران

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Colonial Scholars, Persian Historiographical Sources: Translations and Past India

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Received: 2012/6/21

Accepted:2014/6/14

Abstract

The importance or centrality of Persian histories (whether imperial, regional or universal) can be gauged from the deep reliance placed by British historians on them for their own understanding of India's past. The examples are numerous: Dow, Erskine, Elliot and Dowson explored Persian sources for their writings. Stewart also based his *History of Bengal* mainly on Persian materials; Mill did not know Persian and so wrote his *History of India* from Persian sources translated into English. Marshman used published English translations of Persian texts in the compilation of his *History of Bengal*. Hunter also depended for his understanding of the insight into the history of Muslim rule in Bengal on Persian source materials translated for him into English. Elphinstone, Thomas, Wheeler, Keene, Blochmann and Berveridge were all good Persian scholars and used, in addition to Persian

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sources, coins, inscriptions and archaeological finding for their writings can be fitted with this group. The recent work of Kumkum Chatterjee alerts us to the twin activities of British scholars and historians: translating Persian histories, as well as writing new histories of India based on the already established Persian model. The former indicates a serious engagement of colonial scholars with older models of history writing (as the appreciation heaped on the *A'in* as a historical source in the preface to its published edition indicates); the latter proves the adage that imitation was indeed, in this context, a form of flattery, however unintended.

Keywords: Persian Historiography; Colonial Historiography; Colonization; History and Past; Indo-Persian Culture.

1.Introduction

The Indo-Persian historiography had a long and rich history prior to the coming of the East India Company. Our main concern is with the impact of colonial rule on this genre of history writing. Before discussing the theme article with reference to Indo-Persian historiography, it is relevant to introduce some landmark

texts of this genre that were written in medieval India. The works discussed below are the ones that were considered important by the British for understanding Indian history, and were thus printed by the government or private individuals with this objective.

The earliest Persian historical works in India date back to the

thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and were written in the Delhi Sultanate. Although Al Biruni's famous treatise on India was written in Arabic, it represents the earliest major work produced by a Persian scholar in India. Historians of Delhi Sultanate such as Minhaj-us Siraj Juzjani (*Tabaqat-i Nasiri*) and Zia-uddin Barni (*Tarikh-i Firozshahi* and *Fatawa –i Jahandari*) modeled their works of those written in the Perso-Islamic world. After a brief period of decline coinciding with Timur's invasion of India and the period of the Afghan-Lodi dynasty, the rich tradition of history writing was revived during the Mughal period. History was one of many genres in which books were written; the others included autobiography, collections of poetry, ethical treatises, belles-letters, manuals of technical prose and administration, conversational discourses, and advice literature

(*diwans*, *akhlaq*, *insha*, *malfuzat*, *nasihat*), biographical dictionaries (*tazkira*), and, of course, political histories. There was also a rich corpus of literature on themes relating to religion.

The Mughal emperor Akbar was both the subject and the patron of many Persian-language texts. Akbar's translation projects spanned many languages: the one hand, he had his grandfather Babur's memoirs translated from Turkish to Persian, while on the other hand he also commissioned the translation of many Sanskrit texts into Persian. These include the Persian translation of the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, prepared by 'Abd-ul Qadir Badauni with the assistance of a team of Sanskrit scholars in 1584. Composed in Persian, Ab-ul Fazl's *Akbar nama* and *A'in-i Akbari* are the most important, the latter indeed being unique, texts for understanding

history and institutions of the Empire Mughal. The *A'in-i Akbari*, an elaborate gazetteer, is fundamental for all studies on the administration of the Mughal Empire. The most important of the court or official histories of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan's reign, is that of Abd-ul Hamid Lahori's who wrote *Padshah Nama*. Texts produced in a later period, such as *Alamgir Nama* by Mahammad Kazim Amin and *Muntakhab-ul Lubab* by Khafi Khan were also important representatives of the genre of traditional narrative history. The rendition of Indo-Persian historiography continued throughout the eighteenth century. The *Siyar-ul Mutakharin*, authored by Ghulam Ali Azad Husaini Bilgrami who served both Emperor Shah Alam and the British is a critical analysis of British policy in Bengal in the eighteenth century. Many of the

prose and verse works devoted to the emperors are simply continuation of the narrative and panegyric conventions of earlier periods, except that the events they describe reflect the precipitated deterioration of the empire during the first four decades of the eighteenth century.¹

Translation has often been characterized as a 'central act' of European imperialism. Tejaswini Niranjana has suggested that the practice of translation shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relationships of power that operate under colonialism.² Translation was deployed in different kinds of discourses—philosophy, historiography, education—to renew and perpetuate colonial domination.³

1. See, Stephan F. Dale, 'Indo-Persian Historiography', *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Online Edition, www.iranicaonline.org.

2. Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Colonialism and the Aesthetics of Translation' in, *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India*, eds., Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sudhir and Vivek Dhareshwar, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1993, p.319.

3. *Ibid*, p. 321.

She has also stated that through translation, the colonized were represented in a manner that justified colonial domination. She states that translation 'fixes' colonized cultures, and makes them unchanging.⁴ It is the opinion of Michael Dodson that translation made available legal-cultural information for the administration and rule of the non-west. He argues that its importance lay in that it provided resources for the construction and representation of the colonized as 'Europe's civilizational other'. In his opinion, translation was 'a strategic means for representing "otherness" to primarily domestic British reading audiences'.⁵

In order to examine the views of Niranjana and Dodson in the context of Persian sources, it will be useful to discuss some early printed works

that were English translations of Persian texts. Examples of such translated works include Francis Gladwin's *Transactions in Bengal* which was translated from the Persian *Tawarikh-i Bangala* and published in Calcutta in 1788 and Haji Mustafa's translation of *Siyar-ul Mut'akharin* (Calcutta, 1786).⁶ Similarly, Charles Stewart devoted his time to the translation of Persian texts into English. Out of this project came *The History of Bengal* written from a study of Persian sources and published European works.⁷ In this work, Stewart used fourteen Persian manuscripts, of which twelve were from Tipu Sultan's library.⁸

The preface of books translated from Persian to English usually contains the aims with which they were published in addition to the information about the translator,

4. Niranjana, *Sitting Translation*, p.2.

5. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and national Culture India 1770-1880*, p. 118.

6. Hussain, *Study of Nineteenth Century Historical Works on Muslim Rule in Bengal*, p.13.

7. *Ibid.*, p.18

8. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

place of publication, etc. The preface, therefore, is a useful source for studying the objective and strategy of translation as well as their implications for the colonial rule and the print culture. Here we will examine some of these prefaces with a view to interrogating the text as well as the motivation underlying its production. We must note that many of the translated works were in fact regional histories or biographies of regional rulers.

In 1842 Colonel W. Miles of the East India Company translated and published a Persian book under the title *The History of Hydur Naik, otherwise styled Shums ul Moolk, Ameer ud Dowla, Nawab Hudur Ali Khan Bahadoor, Hudur Jung, Nawab of the Karnatic Balaghut[sic]/ The History of Haydir Naik, otherwise styled Shams-ul Molk, Amir-ud Dowla Nawab Haydir Ali khan Bahadur, Haydir Jang, Nawab of the*

Karzatic Balagat. This translation was based on a work originally written by Mir Husain Ali Khan Kirmani, and the translation was funded by the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland. In his preface to the printed book, Colonel Miles wrote about the problems he had faced during translating the work on account of the specific characteristics of the Persian language. As he put it,

The Persian Language, as any one at all acquainted with it is aware, delights in inflated description, pompous imagery, sounding epithets, and in all extravagant figures; and according to the character of the writer, this genius or affectation of the language is frequently carried to the verge of absurdity— that is, absurdity as measured by our scale. To suppress or soften these peculiarities when very wild, and retain them when

deserving to be kept, is I think, indispensable, and in my translation of this work, I have tried hard to conform to this rule, although I may not perhaps have always succeeded in my endeavour.

Thus, the author stated his intention to produce a translation as faithful to the original as possible. Colonel Miles also indicated that although he was aware of other works on the history of Mysore by English and French writers, he would not be including them in his translation, as 'still we have never seen what those two individuals, or any of their nation, have said of themselves; if we except a portion, and that I believe a small one, of Tipu's letters, translated by the late Colonel Kirkpatrick.' He further compared English histories with the Persian one by stating that their concerns and perspective were entirely different.

For these reasons, I have thought it best to allow Hydur [sic]/ Haydir's historian to tell his tale without comment. This account, compared with those above mentioned, will, it may be presumed, furnish a tolerably fair guide for the general historian. There is, however, only a partial resemblance between the English histories of the wars in the Karnatic and this; only a small part of this relating to the English wars, while, on the contrary, the English histories contain very little else.

Colonel Miles' preface is a good example of a translation that was done in order to allow 'native' historians to speak in their own voice. His ideas about the importance of reading a Persian history for a period for which many English and French histories were also available, indicates the esteem in which he held Persian historiographical traditions.

In 1786, Captain Jonathan Scott (who served the East India Company and also functioned as private personal translator to Warren Hastings) published in London his translation from Persian into English of *The Memoirs of Eradat Khan*[sic]/ *The memories of Eradat Khan*, who he described as a 'nobleman of Hindostan'. The memoir was said to contain interesting anecdotes about Aurangzeb and his successors Shah Alam and Jahandar Shah, in which these one could find 'the causes of the very precipitate decline of the Mogul Empire in India.' Thus, the very fact that such a work was translated by an employee of the East India company indicates the concern that company had with the Mughal past of India. As Kumkum Chatterjee has indicated, British accounts of the collapse of the Mughal Empire depended heavily on Persian sources such as this one. Thus, while some

British authors were writing histories of India in English, these histories were based on Persian texts produced in India, and translated in to English by yet other British scholars.

Translations of texts were done also to identify and study such ethnic groups as were considered useful for colonial administration. Major J. Browne translated into English a work on the orders of the Directors of the East India Company that was printed in London in 1788. Browne indicated in the preface that he had served as the English minister at the court of Shah Alam, and in that period had acquired considerable knowledge of states bordering Agra and Delhi. He had met two Hindu residents of Lahore who possessed an account of the rise of the Sikhs written in Nagri character and also acquired an abridged Persian translation of this text from them,

which he then rendered into English. Addressing the court of Directors, he emphasized that he was convinced that ‘the rapid progress of this sect, will hereafter render a knowledge of them, their strength, and government, very important to the administration of Bengal.’⁹ Thus, the history of one part of India was seen to be an important example for the rest of the country. This book provides an example of a translation twice removed from the original. What had once been a manuscript was transformed after translation into a printed text that could be circulated much more widely, and thus made more accessible. Thus, translation and printing worked in tandem to disseminate ‘useful’ texts more widely.

Yet another work entitled *British India Analyzed: The Provincial and Revenue Establishments of Tippoo[Tipu] Sultaun and of Mahomedan and British Conquerors in Hindostan* [sic] was printed in London in 1793 in three parts. One part, originally published in Calcutta in 1792, was titled *The Mysorean Revenue Regulations* and translated by Burrish Crisp. In the advertisement for the book, it was stated that the original belonged to Colonel John Murray who acquired it during the Coimbatore campaign, and the book was important as it was the ‘most accurate delineation of the modern Mahomedan government that has appeared’. The translator also expressed his gratitude to Colonel John Murray while expressing his disappointment at not being able to find reliable people in Calcutta to translate Malabar dialects or to explain provincial terms. He

9. Major J. Browne, *India Tracts: Containing a Description of the Jungle Terry Districts, Their Revenue, Trade, and Government: With a Plan for the Improvement of Them, Also an History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks*, London, 1788, p. iii.

was thus forced to explain the terms from context, and apologized for the errors that may have crept in. This episode indicates the dependence of British translators on native informants for information about term etc. When such a native informant could not be found (for a language other than Persian, as in this example), the work necessarily suffered.

The Life of Hafiz ool Moolk[sic]/ The life of Hafiz-ul Molk, was the translation of the biography of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, Nawab of Rohilkhand, was a book written by his son, Nawab Mustajab Khan Bahadur titled *Gulistan-i Rahmat*. It was abridged and translated by Charles Elliott in 1831 and printed in London. In his introduction to the work, Elliott stated that he had omitted many trivial episodes from the original. These omissions included

...the repeated encomiums lavished by the Nuwab[Nawab] on the generosity and intrepidity of his lamented parent, though honourable to his feelings as a son, would be deemed extravagant by the generality of readers, and indeed would scarcely admit of translation.

Elliott also provided the reason for translating the book. According to him, the Nawab's memory in Rohilkhand was 'held in the highest veneration' and he had a distinguished career for over thirty years, and that his life 'may furnish some materials to aid in the compilation of a history of that period: and with this view, I have taken considerable pains to correct some chronological errors in the original.' Thus, we get a sense of the translator in this case not only deciding which work should be translated and why (thereby acting as a 'filter'), but also deciding which

episodes were trivial and did not deserve to be translated. Elliott also told the reader that his translation would be at variance with Hamilton's *History of the Rohillas* as Hamilton obtained his information from the Nawab of Awadh, who was, of course, a rival of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, and because 'as that work was published about the time of Mr. Hastings's trial, it might have been intended to frame an excuse for his permitting a British army to join in the attack on Hafiz in 1774.'

A slightly later work was *Mirat-i Ahmadi*, also regional history, which was written in Persian by the revenue minister of Gujarat, Ali Muhammad Khan. It was partially translated into English, annotated and introduced by James Bird, and published in London in 1835. Bird provided the rationale for the English translation of the work by

stating that it had been done so that Europeans would understand 'Asiatics' better, and come to possess an accurate as well as comprehensive knowledge of their way of life:

Though the acquirement of these, and the cultivation of oriental literature, may be of use, in enlarging our views of general history and geography, they serve a yet more important purpose, in this country, by removing the prejudices of early education, by interesting the feelings of Europeans for the welfare of Asiatics, and disposing the former to treat as equals those whom they had been taught to consider as inferiors....It is incumbent on us, as rulers of India, to possess an accurate knowledge of its customs, manners, religious opinions, history, and commerce; and regarding the early state of such there is yet a wide field of interesting research. The

influence of the Greek kingdom of Bactria on Sanskrit literature; the knowledge which the Romans possessed of India, and the state of their commerce with the country; the intercourse of the primitive Arabs and eastern Christians with the Hindús; the incorporation of foreign tribes with the aborigines; the institutions of their civil society; and rules of their military policy, are subjects of intense interest, that may be successfully elucidated by closely studying the Greek and Roman authors, in connexion [sic] with Sanskrit literature, and the historical and geographical books in Arabic and Persian.¹⁰

Bird also emphasized the unique nature of his recovery of the text via translation by stating that no manuscript copy of this particular work could be found in Europe. He

10. Ali Muhammad Khan, *The Political and Statistical History of Gujarat: To Which Are Added, Copious Annotations, And A Historical Introduction*, tr., James Bird, London, 1835, p.iii.

acknowledged the help he received in translating the book from a Persian *munshi* by the name of Mir Khairat Ali 'Mushtaq'.¹¹ Thus, the history of this one book ties features the many motifs that we have been tracing: the Orientalist obsession with knowledge that was as accurate as it was comprehensive, and the role of Indian informants in the production of colonial knowledge, the popularizing of a book by the event of its translation and publishing (even though it entered the English, and not Persian print culture). We now move on to the uses to which these translated and printed Persian works were put.

2. Usage of Persian Historical Sources in Making Past

11. *Ibid*, Preface, p.1. Bird appreciated his assistant by saying that had he lived in other times than ours, and under a different system, he would, in consideration of his knowledge of the Persian language and of Mohammedan history, have risen to offices of great rank and emolument.

Just as written histories were an important source for the expansion of knowledge, so were they relevant for identity formation. While ancient Indian history provided an ideal of excellence, medieval history compelled scholars writing in Hindi to grapple with a more painful and problematic past: a past that was, according to their narrative, full of decadence, defeat, division, and subjection.¹² For Orsini, early colonialist histories from the outset signified the power of the colonial state and its agents to appropriate (through translation and subsequent interpretation and judgment) India's past, clear away the undergrowth of mythology, and to create in the cleared space, a proper 'scientific' history that was aimed at helping them to govern India and presenting to its Indian subject-hitherto a people without history- a proper

12. Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940*, p. 507.

account of their past, crafted on the basis of scientific evidence and reason (the tools of the enlightenment scholar). In the nineteenth century, the fragmented field of history was partly transformed and unified by orientalist and by the shift from court, sect, and family to print and the public sphere.¹³ Persian histories were therefore translated to function as part of this project.

Partha Chatterjee had argued that British historians put forward a theory of medieval decline that corresponded to their belief that Muslim rule in India was a period of despotism, misrule and anarchy, and therefore the British were required to amend matters.¹⁴ As a result, for Indian nationalists too ancient India became the classical age, while the period between the ancient and the

13. *Ibid*, p. 178.

14. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994, p.101.

contemporary was the dark age of medievalism. Chatterjee argues that this pattern was supported by European historiography. Just as Europeans were proud of Greek classical heritage, so were English educated Bengalis of Vedic civilization.¹⁵ Chatterjee discussed how Persian sources could be available through British writers' mediation for a people supposedly devoid of historical consciousness. However, Chatterjee's arguments in this case seem to be overstated. Some accounts written by the British, such as that of Sleeman, praised the Mughal state. A landmark in later British historiography on Muslim rule in India, Mountstuart Elphinstone's *The History of India: The Hindu and Mahomedan Periods*, published in 1841, contained a favourable account of Hindu civilization in the

pre-Muslim era *as well as* about the prosperous and well-governed epoch of Muslim history under Akbar and Shah Jahan. This book became popular in Indian Universities; after 1857, when it was translated into Persian, it achieved a wider circulation.¹⁶

Chatterjee's point about the constructs of colonial historiography has been reiterated by Vasant Kaiwar taking ancient India as an example. According to Kaiwar even as British historians demonized Muslim rule in India, they glorified the ancient Indian past. The Aryan model of history in the nineteenth century had two main pillars, one Greek, the other Indian. British writers carried over the myth of the all-conquering Aryan peoples-or Aryan race, once racialist thought had established itself—from the realms of philosophy and religious

15. *Ibid*, p.98.

16. Syed, *Muslim Response to the West*, p. 24.

studies into history and anthropology. In British histories, argues Kaiwar, there was a narrative of invaders, or migrants, who brought technology, linguistic refinement, and philosophy from central Asia or southern Russia to the subcontinent and were, where necessary, fell free to employ techniques of ethnic cleansing against inferior races.¹⁷ The Aryan-Dravidian divide in India was posited as a racial divide between light-skinned northerners and dark-skinned southerners, with the former, naturally, superior and ever victorious. This, in turn, says Kaiwar, generated other myths about lower-caste people in north India, while those of South were termed as the aboriginal Dravidian people.

17. Vasant Kaiwar, 'The Aryan Model of History and the Oriental Renaissance: The politics of Identity in an Age of Revolutions, Colonialism, and Nationalism', in *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation*, eds., Vasant Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar, Andrew E. Barnes, and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003, pp.30-31.

Later historiography would turn Muslims into Aryan civilization's adversaries. Another enduring legacy of the Aryan model of history is the division of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods (corresponding to the ancient, medieval, and modern periods of European history), established originally by British and later by nationalist historians. This division originally served a polemical purpose for the British, who claimed that they were in India to restore the glories of ancient India by liberating India from Muslim rule. Kaiwar terms the Aryan model of history as an attempt to write world history keeping race at the centre-stage.¹⁸

A deeper insight into the process by which Western knowledge of the Orient is offered by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, who argues that the historiographical selection of

18. *Ibid*, pp.37-49.

certain Persian medieval court chronicles to reconstruct the Indian past played a strategic role in constituting ‘the west’ as the site of progress and innovation and ‘the orient’ as the locus of backwardness and tradition. Targhi believes that in its early phase modern Oriental studies did not constitute a discourse of domination but reciprocal relation between European and Indian scholars. In this view he differs from the classic Saidian position of the colonial subject without agency. Targhi then traces the transformation of Orientalist inquiry into a discourse of western domination, which resulted in the obliteration of all traces of ‘Oriental’ agency, voice, writing, and creativity. Thus, his analysis is capable of plotting changes in the situation. The colonial subject was not entirely without agency; he had it, then lost it. This happened, according to him,

with the rise of science in the eighteenth century, following which the contribution of non-European scholars was increasingly marginalized and deemed nonobjective.¹⁹

In an earlier section, we have discussed the case of Persian books that were translated into English for a British audience. In keeping with this section’s focus on the uses of which history was put in the colonial set up in India, we will now consider some examples of English texts translated into Persian, this time for an Indian audience. It is relevant here to refer to a book that was translated from English to Persian in 1859 and published by the Baptist Mission Press. The book was John C. Marshman’s *History of India: From Remote Antiquity to the Accession of Mogul Dynasty* to

19. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, ‘Orientalism’s Genesis Amnesia’ in *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation*, pp.103-106.

which the translator Maulvi Abd-ur Rahim Gorakhpuri, gave the title *Tarikh-i Hindustan*. The translation was patronized by Md. Bahram Shah (Tipu Sultan's grandson) who dedicated it to the then Viceroy Lord Canning, stating that it had been translated in an 'easy and homely style, agreeably to the instructions of the under named, with profound respect and in fervent hope of meeting with His Excellency's benign approbation'. The book is in two parts and sixteen chapters: the first part (six chapters) is a general history of India, its geography, and history of Hindus generally. The second part has nine chapters and it is a description of the period from the beginning of Arab and Turkish rule in India till the arrival of the Portuguese. The last chapter is a separate treatment of the Portuguese. The translator stated that the book was an abridged version of the

original as the bulky original was too tedious to read. He claimed that it would make readers aware about the events in Hindustan from the time of 'Hindu kings' till the arrival of the Portuguese. He also maintained that the ancient history of India was full of incorrect facts and myths as old documents had been destroyed. He said that although few histories of ancient India had been written in the Islamic period as well, it was under the British government that ancient history was well researched. The British wrote facts correctly about ancient India carefully, and they were continuing this work. In chapter sixteen, about the arrival of Portuguese to India, the translator wrote that they came to the Deccan under the Bahmanids and this marked the conquest of Hindustan by Christianity. After 200 years of Portuguese rule, the British were able to take over Hindustan and this

was divine fate. They took Hindustan from Muslims in the same way as Muslims were able to take it from the Hindus.²⁰

Persian was thus considered a suitable medium through which the Indian past was selected, interpreted and then transmitted to an Indian audience via British mediation. Indians were thus taught a version of their own history, in their own language. The same was the case with Urdu, which became another effective medium of transmitting the Indian past to students. *Tarikh-i Firishta*, for example, was translated into Urdu and was being used as a textbook in the Delhi College for Arabic and Persian classes. In a study of colonial history textbooks in India, Powell states that most of the textbooks in the 1830s and 1840s, whether in English or Urdu, treated pre-tenth-century history as

an ill-defined era preceding what was termed the 'arrival of the Ghaznavids'. The entire pre-tenth century was passed over rapidly and perfunctorily, mainly on the ground that it was not possible to distinguish 'historical fact' from 'fable' until the well-documented 'Mohammedan era'.²¹

Many Urdu translations of Persian and English histories of India, mostly from the Delhi College press in the mid-1840s (not all of which were intended for school or college use) were published, which mostly neglected the pre-tenth century past. Among such regional and dynastic works may be included the Urdu translation, by a teacher called Nur Muhammad of the *Tarikh-i Mughaliya (History of the Mughals)*, which was taught in the Persian

20. Translation: Mehrdad Ramezannia.

21. Avril A. Powell, 'History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-colonial past in North Western India in the 1860s and 1870s', in *Invoking the Past: The Use of History in South Asia*, ed., Daud Ali, Oxford University Press., New Delhi, 1999, pp. 96-97.

Department of the Delhi College from 1849 onwards. The same teacher also translated the *Tarikh-i Bengal*, which was taught, among other places, in the science classes of Delhi College's 'Oriental' section from 1853 onwards.²²

The case of another history book, *Miftah-ul Tawarikh*, which was written by Thomas William Beale is equally interesting. It was first published by the Messenger Press Agra in 1849, and subscribed to by 28 British and 33 Indians. Later, the book was published again by Munshi Nawal Kishore in Kanpur in 1867. The title page mentioned that it was a collection of the most valuable chronograms in the Persian language, showing the exact year and date of the birth, deaths, etc. of Muslims kings, philosophers and their eminent men with historical observations, inscriptions on ancient

buildings with other descriptions, from the commencement to 1265 hijri. These were said to be extracted from Persian histories and arranged in chronological order by the author. It was divided into thirteen sections. In the preface(*dibacha*) the author talked about the different kinds of histories –birth and death of Muhammad and ended with the arrival of the British.²³

Conclusion

Although most British historians were prejudiced against the medieval period, regarding it as degenerate, oppressive and backward, there were important exceptions to this rule too, the most prominent being the work of Monstuart Elphinstone, who praised the rule of Akbar and Shah Jahan. In their analysis of the past of Bengal, the British interpreted its history in terms of relations between

22. *Ibid*, p. 98.

23. *Miftah -ul Tawarikh*, Nawal Kishore, 1867. Translation; Mehrdad Ramezanniae.

communities made distinct by different, religiously based, civilizations. The importance or centrality of Persian histories as we tried had a deep influence on British historians for their own understanding of India's past. We can perceive two trends in the publication of Persian historical works. While court chronicles of the Mughal period were published for readers in Britain or for the use of British administrators in India, there was also a trend towards the publication of regional histories.

The English translation of Persian histories undertaken by colonial officials and scholars had important ramifications. Once a Persian text had been translated into English and printed, it underwent a double transformation: from manuscript (often privately owned) to a printed codex (for public distribution), and from a language unintelligible to

many British administrators (Persian) to one with which they were most familiar (English). The audience of the work thus expanded in these two very important ways. Colonial scholars were interested in the Mughal past in order to better pose as legitimate successors of the Mughals in India; they were interested in its decline so as to learn 'lessons' from the past, and presumably apply these so as to preempt the fall of the British one. Written historical records, specifically Persian ones, were therefore studied, translated, and published with one eye looking to the future and one to the past.

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پژوهشگران استعماری، منابع تاریخ‌نگاری فارسی: ترجمه و گذشته‌ی هند

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تاریخ پذیرش: ۹۲/۳/۲۴

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۱/۴/۱

اهمیت یا محوریت منابع تاریخ‌نگاری فارسی (اعم از امپراتوری / درباری، منطقه ای یا جهانی) را می‌توان از اعتماد عمیق مورخان انگلیسی از درک خودشان از گذشته‌ی هند در این منابع جست. نمونه‌ها فراوان است: دوو، ارسکینن، الیوت، و داوسن منابع فارسی را برای نوشته‌هایشان مورد بررسی قرار دادند. استوارت کتابش «تاریخ بنگال» بر اساس منابع فارسی نگاشت. میل اگرچه فارسی نمی‌دانست ولی کتاب «تاریخ هند» اش را بر اساس منابع فارسی ترجمه شده به انگلیسی نوشت. ماشرمن متون فارسی چاپ شده به فارسی را برای تألیف کتاب «تاریخ بنگال» اش مورد استفاده قرار داد. هانتر نیز در درکش درباره‌ی تاریخ مسلمانان هند به منابع فارسی وابسته بود. در پژوهش اخیر، محققین ما را از فعالیت‌های دوگانه‌ی محققین و مورخین انگلیسی: ترجمه‌ی منابع تاریخ فارسی، و همین‌طور نوشتن تاریخ جدید هند بر اساس قالب مرسوم درکتب فارسی پیشین، آگاه می‌سازند. پژوهشگران استعماری به گذشته‌ی تاریخ تیموریان هند، به عبارتی در بهتر موقعیت قراردادن خود به موجب منابع معتبر تیموریان در هندوستان علاقه‌مند بودند. بنابراین، اسناد تاریخی ثبت‌شده، خصوصاً منابع فارسی، مورد مطالعه، ترجمه، و انتشار با نگاهی به آینده از طریق گذشته — قرار گرفتند. مقاله به پیوند بهره‌گیری این منابع توسط محققین استعماری در تبیین گذشته‌ی هند (تاریخ‌نگاری استعماری) می‌پردازد.

واژگان کلیدی: تاریخ‌نگاری فارسی، تاریخ‌نگاری استعماری، استعمارگرایی، تاریخ و گذشته، فرهنگ هند و ایران

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Colonial Scholars, Persian Historiographical Sources: Translations and Past India

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Received: 2012/6/21

Accepted:2014/6/14

Abstract

The importance or centrality of Persian histories (whether imperial, regional or universal) can be gauged from the deep reliance placed by British historians on them for their own understanding of India's past. The examples are numerous: Dow, Erskine, Elliot and Dowson explored Persian sources for their writings. Stewart also based his *History of Bengal* mainly on Persian materials; Mill did not know Persian and so wrote his *History of India* from Persian sources translated into English. Marshman used published English translations of Persian texts in the compilation of his *History of Bengal*. Hunter also depended for his understanding of the insight into the history of Muslim rule in Bengal on Persian source materials translated for him into English. Elphinstone, Thomas, Wheeler, Keene, Blochmann and Berveridge were all good Persian scholars and used, in addition to Persian sources, coins, inscriptions and archaeological finding for

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their writings can be fitted with this group. The recent work of Kumkum Chatterjee alerts us to the twin activities of British scholars and historians: translating Persian histories, as well as writing new histories of India based on the already established Persian model. The former indicates a serious engagement of colonial scholars with older models of history writing (as the appreciation heaped on the *A'in* as a historical source in the preface to its published edition indicates); the latter proves the adage that imitation was indeed, in this context, a form of flattery, however unintended.

Keywords: Persian Historiography; Colonial Historiography; Colonization; History and Past; Indo-Persian Culture.

1.Introduction

The Indo-Persian historiography had a long and rich history prior to the coming of the East India Company. Our main concern is with the impact of colonial rule on this genre of history writing. Before discussing the theme article with reference to Indo-Persian historiography, it is relevant to introduce some landmark texts of this genre that were written

in medieval India. The works discussed below are the ones that were considered important by the British for understanding Indian history, and were thus printed by the government or private individuals with this objective.

The earliest Persian historical works in India date back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and were written in the Delhi

Sultanate. Although Al Biruni's famous treatise on India was written in Arabic, it represents the earliest major work produced by a Persian scholar in India. Historians of Delhi Sultanate such as Minhaj-us Siraj Juzjani (*Tabaqat-i Nasiri*) and Zia-uddin Barni (*Tarikh-i Firozshahi* and *Fatawa –i Jahandari*) modeled their works of those written in the Perso-Islamic world. After a brief period of decline coinciding with Timur's invasion of India and the period of the Afghan-Lodi dynasty, the rich tradition of history writing was revived during the Mughal period. History was one of many genres in which books were written; the others included autobiography, collections of poetry, ethical treatises, belles-letters, manuals of technical prose and administration, conversational discourses, and advice literature (*diwans, akhlaq, insha, malfuzat, nasihat*), biographical dictionaries

(*tazkira*), and, of course, political histories. There was also a rich corpus of literature on themes relating to religion.

The Mughal emperor Akbar was both the subject and the patron of many Persian-language texts. Akbar's translation projects spanned many languages: the one hand, he had his grandfather Babur's memoirs translated from Turkish to Persian, while on the other hand he also commissioned the translation of many Sanskrit texts into Persian. These include the Persian translation of the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, prepared by 'Abd-ul Qadir Badauni with the assistance of a team of Sanskrit scholars in 1584. Composed in Persian, Ab-ul Fazl's *Akbar nama* and *A'in-i Akbari* are the most important, the latter indeed being unique, texts for understanding history and institutions of the Empire Mughal. The *A'in-i Akbari*,

an elaborate gazetteer, is fundamental for all studies on the administration of the Mughal Empire. The most important of the court or official histories of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan's reign, is that of Abd-ul Hamid Lahori's who wrote *Padshah Nama*. Texts produced in a later period, such as *Alamgir Nama* by Mahammad Kazim Amin and *Muntakhab-ul Lubab* by Khafi Khan were also important representatives of the genre of traditional narrative history. The rendition of Indo-Persian historiography continued throughout the eighteenth century. The *Siyar-ul Mutakharin*, authored by Ghulam Ali Azad Husaini Bilgrami who served both Emperor Shah Alam and the British is a critical analysis of British policy in Bengal in the eighteenth century. Many of the prose and verse works devoted to the emperors are simply continuation of

the narrative and panegyric conventions of earlier periods, except that the events they describe reflect the precipitated deterioration of the empire during the first four decades of the eighteenth century.¹

Translation has often been characterized as a 'central act' of European imperialism. Tejaswini Niranjana has suggested that the practice of translation shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relationships of power that operate under colonialism.² Translation was deployed in different kinds of discourses—philosophy, historiography, education—to renew and perpetuate colonial domination.³ She has also stated that through translation, the colonized were

1. See, Stephan F. Dale, 'Indo-Persian Historiography', *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Online Edition, www.iranicaonline.org.

2. Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Colonialism and the Aesthetics of Translation' in, *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India*, eds., Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sudhir and Vivek Dhareshwar, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1993, p.319.

3. *Ibid*, p. 321.

represented in a manner that justified colonial domination. She states that translation 'fixes' colonized cultures, and makes them unchanging.⁴ It is the opinion of Michael Dodson that translation made available legal-cultural information for the administration and rule of the non-west. He argues that its importance lay in that it provided resources for the construction and representation of the colonized as 'Europe's civilizational other'. In his opinion, translation was 'a strategic means for representing "otherness" to primarily domestic British reading audiences'.⁵

In order to examine the views of Niranjana and Dodson in the context of Persian sources, it will be useful to discuss some early printed works that were English translations of Persian texts. Examples of such

translated works include Francis Gladwin's *Transactions in Bengal* which was translated from the Persian *Tawarikh-i Bangala* and published in Calcutta in 1788 and Haji Mustafa's translation of *Siyar-ul Mut'akharin* (Calcutta, 1786).⁶ Similarly, Charles Stewart devoted his time to the translation of Persian texts into English. Out of this project came *The History of Bengal* written from a study of Persian sources and published European works.⁷ In this work, Stewart used fourteen Persian manuscripts, of which twelve were from Tipu Sultan's library.⁸

The preface of books translated from Persian to English usually contains the aims with which they were published in addition to the information about the translator, place of publication, etc. The preface, therefore, is a useful source

4. Niranjana, *Sitting Translation*, p.2.

5. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and national Culture India 1770-1880*, p. 118.

6. Hussain, *Study of Nineteenth Century Historical Works on Muslim Rule in Bengal*, p.13.

7. *Ibid*, p.18

8. *Ibid*, p. 21.

for studying the objective and strategy of translation as well as their implications for the colonial rule and the print culture. Here we will examine some of these prefaces with a view to interrogating the text as well as the motivation underlying its production. We must note that many of the translated works were in fact regional histories or biographies of regional rulers.

In 1842 Colonel W. Miles of the East India Company translated and published a Persian book under the title *The History of Hydur Naik, otherwise styled Shums ul Moolk, Ameer ud Dowla, Nawab Hudur Ali Khan Bahadoor, Hudur Jung, Nawab of the Karnatic Balaghut[sic]/ The History of Haydir Naik, otherwise styled Shams-ul Molk, Amir-ud Dowla Nawab Haydir Ali khan Bahadur, Haydir Jang, Nawab of the Karzatic Balagat*. This translation was based on a work originally

written by Mir Husain Ali Khan Kirmani, and the translation was funded by the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland. In his preface to the printed book, Colonel Miles wrote about the problems he had faced during translating the work on account of the specific characteristics of the Persian language. As he put it,

The Persian Language, as any one at all acquainted with it is aware, delights in inflated description, pompous imagery, sounding epithets, and in all extravagant figures; and according to the character of the writer, this genius or affectation of the language is frequently carried to the verge of absurdity— that is, absurdity as measured by our scale. To suppress or soften these peculiarities when very wild, and retain them when deserving to be kept, is I think, indispensable, and in my translation

of this work, I have tried hard to conform to this rule, although I may not perhaps have always succeeded in my endeavour.

Thus, the author stated his intention to produce a translation as faithful to the original as possible. Colonel Miles also indicated that although he was aware of other works on the history of Mysore by English and French writers, he would not be including them in his translation, as 'still we have never seen what those two individuals, or any of their nation, have said of themselves; if we except a portion, and that I believe a small one, of Tipu's letters, translated by the late Colonel Kirkpatrick.' He further compared English histories with the Persian one by stating that their concerns and perspective were entirely different.

For these reasons, I have thought it best to allow Hydur [sic]/ Haydir's

historian to tell his tale without comment. This account, compared with those above mentioned, will, it may be presumed, furnish a tolerably fair guide for the general historian. There is, however, only a partial resemblance between the English histories of the wars in the Karnatic and this; only a small part of this relating to the English wars, while, on the contrary, the English histories contain very little else.

Colonel Miles' preface is a good example of a translation that was done in order to allow 'native' historians to speak in their own voice. His ideas about the importance of reading a Persian history for a period for which many English and French histories were also available, indicates the esteem in which he held Persian historiographical traditions.

In 1786, Captain Jonathan Scott (who served the East India Company

and also functioned as private personal translator to Warren Hastings) published in London his translation from Persian into English of *The Memoirs of Eradat Khan*[sic]/ *The memories of Eradat Khan*, who he described as a 'nobleman of Hindostan'. The memoir was said to contain interesting anecdotes about Aurangzeb and his successors Shah Alam and Jahandar Shah, in which these one could find 'the causes of the very precipitate decline of the Mogul Empire in India.' Thus, the very fact that such a work was translated by an employee of the East India company indicates the concern that company had with the Mughal past of India. As Kumkum Chatterjee has indicated, British accounts of the collapse of the Mughal Empire depended heavily on Persian sources such as this one. Thus, while some British authors were writing histories of India in English, these histories

were based on Persian texts produced in India, and translated in to English by yet other British scholars.

Translations of texts were done also to identify and study such ethnic groups as were considered useful for colonial administration. Major J. Browne translated into English a work on the orders of the Directors of the East India Company that was printed in London in 1788. Browne indicated in the preface that he had served as the English minister at the court of Shah Alam, and in that period had acquired considerable knowledge of states bordering Agra and Delhi. He had met two Hindu residents of Lahore who possessed an account of the rise of the Sikhs written in Nagri character and also acquired an abridged Persian translation of this text from them, which he then rendered into English. Addressing the court of Directors, he

emphasized that he was convinced that ‘the rapid progress of this sect, will hereafter render a knowledge of them, their strength, and government, very important to the administration of Bengal.’⁹ Thus, the history of one part of India was seen to be an important example for the rest of the country. This book provides an example of a translation twice removed from the original. What had once been a manuscript was transformed after translation into a printed text that could be circulated much more widely, and thus made more accessible. Thus, translation and printing worked in tandem to disseminate ‘useful’ texts more widely.

Yet another work entitled *British India Analyzed: The Provincial and Revenue Establishments of*

9. Major J. Browne, *India Tracts: Containing a Description of the Jungle Terry Districts, Their Revenue, Trade, and Government: With a Plan for the Improvement of Them, Also an History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks*, London, 1788, p. iii.

Tippoo[Tipu] Sultaun and of Mahomedan and British Conquerors in Hindostan [sic] was printed in London in 1793 in three parts. One part, originally published in Calcutta in 1792, was titled *The Mysorean Revenue Regulations* and translated by Burrish Crisp. In the advertisement for the book, it was stated that the original belonged to Colonel John Murray who acquired it during the Coimbatore campaign, and the book was important as it was the ‘most accurate delineation of the modern Mahomedan government that has appeared’. The translator also expressed his gratitude to Colonel John Murray while expressing his disappointment at not being able to find reliable people in Calcutta to translate Malabar dialects or to explain provincial terms. He was thus forced to explain the terms from context, and apologized for the errors that may have crept in. This

episode indicates the dependence of British translators on native informants for information about term etc. When such a native informant could not be found (for a language other than Persian, as in this example), the work necessarily suffered.

The Life of Hafiz ool Moolk[sic]/ *The life of Hafiz-ul Molk*, was the translation of the biography of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, Nawab of Rohilkhand, was a book written by his son, Nawab Mustajab Khan Bahadur titled *Gulistan-i Rahmat*. It was abridged and translated by Charles Elliott in 1831 and printed in London. In his introduction to the work, Elliott stated that he had omitted many trivial episodes from the original. These omissions included

...the repeated encomiums lavished by the Nuwab[Nawab] on the generosity and intrepidity of his

lamented parent, though honourable to his feelings as a son, would be deemed extravagant by the generality of readers, and indeed would scarcely admit of translation.

Elliott also provided the reason for translating the book. According to him, the Nawab's memory in Rohilkhand was 'held in the highest veneration' and he had a distinguished career for over thirty years, and that his life 'may furnish some materials to aid in the compilation of a history of that period: and with this view, I have taken considerable pains to correct some chronological errors in the original.' Thus, we get a sense of the translator in this case not only deciding which work should be translated and why (thereby acting as a 'filter'), but also deciding which episodes were trivial and did not deserve to be translated. Elliott also told the reader that his translation

would be at variance with Hamilton's *History of the Rohillas* as Hamilton obtained his information from the Nawab of Awadh, who was, of course, a rival of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, and because 'as that work was published about the time of Mr. Hastings's trial, it might have been intended to frame an excuse for his permitting a British army to join in the attack on Hafiz in 1774.'

A slightly later work was *Mirat-i Ahmadi*, also regional history, which was written in Persian by the revenue minister of Gujarat, Ali Muhammad Khan. It was partially translated into English, annotated and introduced by James Bird, and published in London in 1835. Bird provided the rationale for the English translation of the work by stating that it had been done so that Europeans would understand 'Asiatics' better, and come to

possess an accurate as well as comprehensive knowledge of their way of life:

Though the acquirement of these, and the cultivation of oriental literature, may be of use, in enlarging our views of general history and geography, they serve a yet more important purpose, in this country, by removing the prejudices of early education, by interesting the feelings of Europeans for the welfare of Asiatics, and disposing the former to treat as equals those whom they had been taught to consider as inferiors....It is incumbent on us, as rulers of India, to possess an accurate knowledge of its customs, manners, religious opinions, history, and commerce; and regarding the early state of such there is yet a wide field of interesting research. The influence of the Greek kingdom of Bactria on Sanskrit literature; the knowledge which the Romans

possessed of India, and the state of their commerce with the country; the intercourse of the primitive Arabs and eastern Christians with the Hindús; the incorporation of foreign tribes with the aborigines; the institutions of their civil society; and rules of their military policy, are subjects of intense interest, that may be successfully elucidated by closely studying the Greek and Roman authors, in connexion [sic] with Sanskrit literature, and the historical and geographical books in Arabic and Persian.¹⁰

Bird also emphasized the unique nature of his recovery of the text via translation by stating that no manuscript copy of this particular work could be found in Europe. He acknowledged the help he received in translating the book from a Persian *munshi* by the name of Mir

10. Ali Muhammad Khan, *The Political and Statistical History of Gujarat: To Which Are Added, Copious Annotations, And A Historical Introduction*, tr., James Bird, London, 1835, p.iii.

Khairat Ali ‘Mushtaq’.¹¹ Thus, the history of this one book ties features the many motifs that we have been tracing: the Orientalist obsession with knowledge that was as accurate as it was comprehensive, and the role of Indian informants in the production of colonial knowledge, the popularizing of a book by the event of its translation and publishing (even though it entered the English, and not Persian print culture). We now move on to the uses to which these translated and printed Persian works were put.

2. Usage of Persian Historical Sources in Making Past

Just as written histories were an important source for the expansion of knowledge, so were they relevant for identity formation. While ancient

11. *Ibid*, Preface, p.1. Bird appreciated his assistant by saying that had he lived in other times than ours, and under a different system, he would, in consideration of his knowledge of the Persian language and of Mohammedan history, have risen to offices of great rank and emolument.

Indian history provided an ideal of excellence, medieval history compelled scholars writing in Hindi to grapple with a more painful and problematic past: a past that was, according to their narrative, full of decadence, defeat, division, and subjection.¹² For Orsini, early colonialist histories from the outset signified the power of the colonial state and its agents to appropriate (through translation and subsequent interpretation and judgment) India's past, clear away the undergrowth of mythology, and to create in the cleared space, a proper 'scientific' history that was aimed at helping them to govern India and presenting to its Indian subject-hitherto a people without history- a proper account of their past, crafted on the basis of scientific evidence and reason (the tools of the enlightenment scholar). In the

12. Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940*, p. 507.

nineteenth century, the fragmented field of history was partly transformed and unified by orientalists and by the shift from court, sect, and family to print and the public sphere.¹³ Persian histories were therefore translated to function as part of this project.

Partha Chatterjee had argued that British historians put forward a theory of medieval decline that corresponded to their belief that Muslim rule in India was a period of despotism, misrule and anarchy, and therefore the British were required to amend matters.¹⁴ As a result, for Indian nationalists too ancient India became the classical age, while the period between the ancient and the contemporary was the dark age of medievalism. Chatterjee argues that this pattern was supported by European historiography. Just as

13. *Ibid*, p. 178.

14. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories*, OxfordUniversityPress, New Delhi, 1994, p.101.

Europeans were proud of Greek classical heritage, so were English educated Bengalis of Vedic civilization.¹⁵ Chatterjee discussed how Persian sources could be available through British writers' mediation for a people supposedly devoid of historical consciousness. However, Chatterjee's arguments in this case seem to be overstated. Some accounts written by the British, such as that of Sleeman, praised the Mughal state. A landmark in later British historiography on Muslim rule in India, Mountstuart Elphinstone's *The History of India: The Hindu and Mahomedan Periods*, published in 1841, contained a favourable account of Hindu civilization in the pre-Muslim era *as well as* about the prosperous and well-governed epoch of Muslim history under Akbar and Shah Jahan. This book became

popular in Indian Universities; after 1857, when it was translated into Persian, it achieved a wider circulation.¹⁶

Chatterjee's point about the constructs of colonial historiography has been reiterated by Vasant Kaiwar taking ancient India as an example. According to Kaiwar even as British historians demonized Muslim rule in India, they glorified the ancient Indian past. The Aryan model of history in the nineteenth century had two main pillars, one Greek, the other Indian. British writers carried over the myth of the all-conquering Aryan peoples-or Aryan race, once racialist thought had established itself—from the realms of philosophy and religious studies into history and anthropology. In British histories, argues Kaiwar, there was a narrative of invaders, or migrants, who

15. *Ibid*, p.98.

16. Syed, *Muslim Response to the West*, p. 24.

brought technology, linguistic refinement, and philosophy from central Asia or southern Russia to the subcontinent and were, where necessary, fell free to employ techniques of ethnic cleansing against inferior races.¹⁷ The Aryan-Dravidian divide in India was posited as a racial divide between light-skinned northerners and dark-skinned southerners, with the former, naturally, superior and ever victorious. This, in turn, says Kaiwar, generated other myths about lower-caste people in north India, while those of South were termed as the aboriginal Dravidian people. Later historiography would turn Muslims into Aryan civilization's adversaries. Another enduring legacy of the Aryan model of history

is the division of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods (corresponding to the ancient, medieval, and modern periods of European history), established originally by British and later by nationalist historians. This division originally served a polemical purpose for the British, who claimed that they were in India to restore the glories of ancient India by liberating India from Muslim rule. Kaiwar terms the Aryan model of history as an attempt to write world history keeping race at the centre-stage.¹⁸

A deeper insight into the process by which Western knowledge of the Orient is offered by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, who argues that the historiographical selection of certain Persian medieval court chronicles to reconstruct the Indian past played a strategic role in constituting 'the west' as the site of

17. Vasant Kaiwar, 'The Aryan Model of History and the Oriental Renaissance: The politics of Identity in an Age of Revolutions, Colonialism, and Nationalism', in *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation*, eds., Vasant Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar, Andrew E. Barnes, and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003, pp.30-31.

18. *Ibid*, pp.37-49.

progress and innovation and ‘the orient’ as the locus of backwardness and tradition. Targhi believes that in its early phase modern Oriental studies did not constitute a discourse of domination but reciprocal relation between European and Indian scholars. In this view he differs from the classic Saidian position of the colonial subject without agency. Targhi then traces the transformation of Orientalist inquiry into a discourse of western domination, which resulted in the obliteration of all traces of ‘Oriental’ agency, voice, writing, and creativity. Thus, his analysis is capable of plotting changes in the situation. The colonial subject was not entirely without agency; he had it, then lost it. This happened, according to him, with the rise of science in the eighteenth century, following which the contribution of non-European scholars was increasingly

marginalized and deemed nonobjective.¹⁹

In an earlier section, we have discussed the case of Persian books that were translated into English for a British audience. In keeping with this section’s focus on the uses of which history was put in the colonial set up in India, we will now consider some examples of English texts translated into Persian, this time for an Indian audience. It is relevant here to refer to a book that was translated from English to Persian in 1859 and published by the Baptist Mission Press. The book was John C. Marshman’s *History of India: From Remote Antiquity to the Accession of Mogul Dynasty* to which the translator Maulvi Abd-ur Rahim Gorakhpuri, gave the title *Tarikh-i Hindustan*. The translation was patronized by Md. Bahram Shah

19. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, ‘Orientalism’s Genesis Amnesia’ in *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation*, pp.103-106.

(Tipu Sultan's grandson) who dedicated it to the then Viceroy Lord Canning, stating that it had been translated in an 'easy and homely style, agreeably to the instructions of the under named, with profound respect and in fervent hope of meeting with His Excellency's benign approbation'. The book is in two parts and sixteen chapters: the first part (six chapters) is a general history of India, its geography, and history of Hindus generally. The second part has nine chapters and it is a description of the period from the beginning of Arab and Turkish rule in India till the arrival of the Portuguese. The last chapter is a separate treatment of the Portuguese. The translator stated that the book was an abridged version of the original as the bulky original was too tedious to read. He claimed that it would make readers aware about the events in Hindustan from the time of

'Hindu kings' till the arrival of the Portuguese. He also maintained that the ancient history of India was full of incorrect facts and myths as old documents had been destroyed. He said that although few histories of ancient India had been written in the Islamic period as well, it was under the British government that ancient history was well researched. The British wrote facts correctly about ancient India carefully, and they were continuing this work. In chapter sixteen, about the arrival of Portuguese to India, the translator wrote that they came to the Deccan under the Bahmanids and this marked the conquest of Hindustan by Christianity. After 200 years of Portuguese rule, the British were able to take over Hindustan and this was divine fate. They took Hindustan from Muslims in the same

way as Muslims were able to take it from the Hindus.²⁰

Persian was thus considered a suitable medium through which the Indian past was selected, interpreted and then transmitted to an Indian audience via British mediation. Indians were thus taught a version of their own history, in their own language. The same was the case with Urdu, which became another effective medium of transmitting the Indian past to students. *Tarikh-i Firishhta*, for example, was translated into Urdu and was being used as a textbook in the Delhi College for Arabic and Persian classes. In a study of colonial history textbooks in India, Powell states that most of the textbooks in the 1830s and 1840s, whether in English or Urdu, treated pre-tenth-century history as an ill-defined era preceding what was termed the ‘arrival of the

Ghaznavids’. The entire pre-tenth century was passed over rapidly and perfunctorily, mainly on the ground that it was not possible to distinguish ‘historical fact’ from ‘fable’ until the well-documented ‘Mohammedan era’.²¹

Many Urdu translations of Persian and English histories of India, mostly from the Delhi College press in the mid-1840s (not all of which were intended for school or college use) were published, which mostly neglected the pre-tenth century past. Among such regional and dynastic works may be included the Urdu translation, by a teacher called Nur Muhammad of the *Tarikh-i Mughaliya (History of the Mughals)*, which was taught in the Persian Department of the Delhi College from 1849 onwards. The same

20. Translation: Mehrdad Ramezannia.

21. Avril A. Powell, ‘History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-colonial past in North Western India in the 1860s and 1870s’, in *Invoking the Past: The Use of History in South Asia*, ed., Daud Ali, Oxford University Press., New Delhi, 1999, pp. 96-97.

teacher also translated the *Tarikh-i Bengal*, which was taught, among other places, in the science classes of Delhi College's 'Oriental' section from 1853 onwards.²²

The case of another history book, *Miftah-ul Tawarikh*, which was written by Thomas William Beale is equally interesting. It was first published by the Messenger Press Agra in 1849, and subscribed to by 28 British and 33 Indians. Later, the book was published again by Munshi Nawal Kishore in Kanpur in 1867. The title page mentioned that it was a collection of the most valuable chronograms in the Persian language, showing the exact year and date of the birth, deaths, etc. of Muslims kings, philosophers and their eminent men with historical observations, inscriptions on ancient buildings with other descriptions, from the commencement to 1265

hijri. These were said to be extracted from Persian histories and arranged in chronological order by the author. It was divided into thirteen sections. In the preface (*dibacha*) the author talked about the different kinds of histories – birth and death of Muhammad and ended with the arrival of the British.²³

Conclusion

Although most British historians were prejudiced against the medieval period, regarding it as degenerate, oppressive and backward, there were important exceptions to this rule too, the most prominent being the work of Monstuart Elphinstone, who praised the rule of Akbar and Shah Jahan. In their analysis of the past of Bengal, the British interpreted its history in terms of relations between communities made distinct by different, religiously based,

22. *Ibid*, p. 98.

23. *Miftah –ul Tawarikh*, Nawal Kishore, 1867. Translation; Mehrdad Ramezanniae.

civilizations. The importance or centrality of Persian histories as we tried had a deep influence on British historians for their own understanding of India's past. We can perceive two trends in the publication of Persian historical works. While court chronicles of the Mughal period were published for readers in Britain or for the use of British administrators in India, there was also a trend towards the publication of regional histories.

The English translation of Persian histories undertaken by colonial officials and scholars had important ramifications. Once a Persian text had been translated into English and printed, it underwent a double transformation: from manuscript (often privately owned) to a printed codex (for public distribution), and from a language unintelligible to many British administrators (Persian) to one with which they

were most familiar (English). The audience of the work thus expanded in these two very important ways. Colonial scholars were interested in the Mughal past in order to better pose as legitimate successors of the Mughals in India; they were interested in its decline so as to learn 'lessons' from the past, and presumably apply these so as to preempt the fall of the British one. Written historical records, specifically Persian ones, were therefore studied, translated, and published with one eye looking to the future and one to the past.

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پژوهشگران استعماری، منابع تاریخ‌نگاری فارسی: ترجمه و گذشته‌ی هند

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تاریخ پذیرش: ۹۲/۳/۲۴

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۱/۴/۱

اهمیت یا محوریت منابع تاریخ‌نگاری فارسی (اعم از امپراتوری/ درباری، منطقه ای یا جهانی) را می‌توان از اعتماد عمیق مورخان انگلیسی از درک خودشان از گذشته‌ی هند در این منابع جست. نمونه‌ها فراوان است: دوو، ارسکین، الیوت، و داوسن منابع فارسی را برای نوشته‌هایشان مورد بررسی قرار دادند. استوارت کتابش «تاریخ بنگال» بر اساس منابع فارسی نگاشت. میل اگرچه فارسی نمی‌دانست ولی کتاب «تاریخ هند» اش را بر اساس منابع فارسی ترجمه شده به انگلیسی نوشت. ماسرمن متون فارسی چاپ شده به فارسی را برای تألیف کتاب «تاریخ بنگال» اش مورد استفاده قرار داد. هانتز نیز در درکش درباره‌ی تاریخ مسلمانان هند به منابع فارسی وابسته بود. در پژوهش اخیر، محققین ما را از فعالیت‌های دوگانه‌ی محققین و مورخین انگلیسی: ترجمه‌ی منابع تاریخ فارسی، و همین‌طور نوشتن تاریخ جدید هند بر اساس قالب مرسوم درکتب فارسی پیشین، آگاه می‌سازند. پژوهشگران استعماری به گذشته‌ی تاریخ تیموریان هند، به عبارتی در بهتر موقعیت قراردادن خود به موجب منابع معتبر تیموریان در هندوستان علاقه‌مند بودند. بنابراین، اسناد تاریخی ثبت‌شده، خصوصاً منابع فارسی، مورد مطالعه، ترجمه، و انتشار - با نگاهی به آینده از طریق گذشته - قرار گرفتند. مقاله به پیوند بهره‌گیری این منابع توسط محققین استعماری در تبیین گذشته‌ی هند (تاریخ‌نگاری استعماری) می‌پردازد.

واژگان کلیدی: تاریخ‌نگاری فارسی، تاریخ‌نگاری استعماری، استعمارگرایی، تاریخ و گذشته، فرهنگ هند و ایران

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