

Persian Historical Sources during the British Period in Sindh (An Introduction and Investigation)

Abstract

The current study is focused on to the introduction and evaluation of the Persian historical sources written during the British period in Sindh(1843-1947). Very little research or investigation has so far been done in this area. Since due to the foreign invasions and foreign rule throughout the centuries till the Mughal rule, the people of Sindh never had the opportunity to pursue or preserve their own language, literature, history and culture. This paper tries briefly to explore the traces of Persian language and its development as an official language of India generally and of Sindh particularly. Persian flourished in Sindh during the medieval period when Arab rule came to an end and the new ruling dynasties coming from Central Asia established their rule over Sindh. Persian supplanted one as the official language of the court and administration. However, Persian did not remain as the official language any more during the British rule but some of the historical records were produced in Persian besides English and Sindhi, the now official languages of Sindh mostly at the instance of the British officials. This paper tries to provide a comprehensive account of all these chronicles and the purpose of English officials' instigation behind such an effort of making records of the progress and development taking place under their patronage. It particularly highlights the value and authenticity of this material as a source of the history of Sindh during this period. It briefly deals with the importance of this work as a reference to the secret missions in order to expand British power further North-West in the Sub-continent. Finally, it shows the reasons of deterioration in the status and standard of Persian in Sindh during this period.

Persian as the Official Language of Sindh:

In the eleventh century, Mahmud of Ghazna conquered Sindh. However, from the eleventh century up to the sixteenth century, Sindh remained semi-independent under the rule of the local dynasties. For almost a century, the Mughal Empire ruled over Sindh. After the destruction of the Mughal Empire, the local dynasties of Sindh were arising, like the Kalhoras, the Talpur Mirs, who ruled over Sindh until the middle of the nineteenth century. After the rule of the Talpurs, Sindh was annexed by the British in 1843 A.D. This was the era during which Persian was

introduced, developed and established as an official and court language of Sindh.

Since the foreign invasions and destruction from foreign invaders throughout the centuries till the Mughal rule, the people of Sindh never had the opportunity to pursue or preserve their own language, literature, history and culture. During the transition period, the foreign invaders influenced the language, literature, history and culture of Sindh. When the Arabs conquered Sindh, most of the literature found was in the Arabic language with great influence of the Arab culture. After the Arabs, the Turks and the Afghans were the rulers of Sindh. They were the men of literary taste. They invited scholars and poets from Iran and Central Asia and patronized them. During this period, Persian language flourished in Sindh and many histories and romantic tales were written in Persian.¹ This change shows the enormous influence of the Persian language on the local communities of Sindh.

However, the British annexation of Sindh is the most vivid event of the 19th century in the history of Sindh. After the annexation of Sindh to the British crown in 1843 CE, followed the previous trend of historiography and encouraged the local scholars to compile works on history. English language supplanted one as the language of the court and administration and Sindhi was introduced as the official language of the province.

Though, Persian was not the official language any more but some of the writers were still writing the chronicles in Persian. This period was dominated by the British writers who recorded their observations during their stay in Sindh provided social, cultural and religious conditions of the inhabitants of this region. On the other hand, some native writers produced only a few short accounts on Sindh mostly on instigation and under the patronage of the British officials in order to propagate the progress of the British government. The British employed local educated people for two main reasons. On one hand, for the translation of the previous official record into English and on the other hand to continue clerical work and pursue literary activities.²

This change formed a new shape in the development of Sindh's historiography and a new era of historical writing began in Sindh. However, the British gradually degraded the status and influence of Persian and simultaneously replaced it by the re-

gional languages in India. This process not only took the months but two or three decades. Hence some Persian work came to be known with erudite, literary and historical significance. The point to be noted is that this literary work was commenced on the desire of the British officials.³

However, Sindh played a vital role in the development of Persian literature and historiography through the centuries. Sindh's tradition of historiography goes as far back as 9th century A.D, when an anonymous writer compiled '*Minhaj al-Din Wa'l Mulk*' in Arabic between 830-840 AD, which was subsequently rendered into Persian as the '*Fatehnamah-e-Sindh*' better known as the '*Chach Namah*' by Ali b.Hamid b. Abi Bakr Al-Kufi in 1216.⁴ These accounts, originally recorded in Arabic appeared as the first book on the history of Sindh and perhaps one of the earliest historical work compiled in the sub-continent. Mir Ali Sher Qanai Thattavi expressly states that no attention was paid to the subject till about 1216 CE, when Ali Kufi of Ouch translated an Arabic account of the conquest of Sindh which is entitled as '*Fathnama-i Sindh*', commonly known as '*Chachnamah*'.⁵ Besides *Chachnamah*, '*Tadhkirah Lubabal Albab*' by Muhammad Aufi was also produced here⁶ and this trend continued later on.

During the 18th century, historical records were the integral parts of intellectual and scholarly development and academics. Although history was not considered formally as a discipline in higher educational system but it had a great influence on the subjects related to human nature. Since its study generates a stimulating force for the human mind, so a great amount of historical literature was produced during this reign.⁸ Besides some regular chronicles, many Administrative manuals and books on trade and commerce were compiled. Versified history was also brought into existence on a large scale.⁹

However, for the progress and advancement of educational and literary activities, political security and prosperity are some of the essential conditions. Therefore, after the British conquest of Sindh in February, 1843 A.D., the British officers emulating the example of the princes and nobles of the previous ruling dynasties encouraged local scholars to compile works on history. As a result, apart from less significant compilation, the major work compiled during this period is as follow:

Tazah Nawa'-i-Ma'arik or History of Sindh & Afghanistan:

This book is written by Munshi Mirza Ata Mohammad of Shikarpur in 1271 A.H., at the instance of Mr. Estwick, Collector of Shikarpur.¹⁰ The author was Munshi of Shah Shuja' in Shikarpur and was well acquainted with development that took the final shape of conquest of Sindh by the British. He describes the events of Shah Shuja's defeat, his flight to Shikarpur, various details, which brought about treaties of the Mir's with the British, march of Afghan army and the Meanee and the Duboo Wars. The editor has also added various biographies. The author pictures hyperbolic exaggeration of his patron's troops against adversaries and has to be examined with caution. This book is considered as an eyewitness because author himself visited Sindh, Kabul, Herat, Qandhar and Peshawar with the Talpur Mirs and Afghan Amirs as Munshi. As a historical analysis of the annexation of Sindh by the British, this book can be used as the most reliable historical source.¹¹

Nudharat-i-Sindh:

This book is a Persian translation of an English book entitled 'The Personal Observation on Sindh, 1843' written by Lieutenant Postans. It was translated in 1854 and the author made some additions till the events of 1858. There is some controversy about the name of actual author. Pir Hussam uddin Rashdi mentions Bushn Narain as the author while in the manuscript in his library mentions Shaikh Abul Hassan as the author.¹² There is a need to make research in this regard.

Ainah-e-Jahan Numa/ Jam-e- Jahan Numa:

This book was also compiled at the instance of a British officer by Makhdum Pir Mohammad alias Mohammad Aqil of Khuhra who died in 1293A.H.¹³ The author belongs to the Makhdum family of Khuhra. This book has been known with many other titles. It covers the world history into three volumes. The third volume is related to the history of Sindh. This book hasn't been published yet but Mukhdum Shafi Mohammad translated a minor portion of it which had been published in 1997 AD entitled '*Tarikh-o-Tazkira-e-Buzurgan-e-Sindh*' (History and memoirs of the Saints of Sindh).¹⁴

Frere Namah:

It is written by Talpur Mir Murad Ali Khan on the request of Sir Bartle Frere, Commissioner in Sindh. The work started in 1865 and consists three parts. The first part is about the Kalhoras, the second about the Talpurs and the last is about the British. "The Kalhora period and their decline" is taken from 'Fateh Namah'. This book has not yet been printed.¹⁵ Mirza Qaleech Beg also translated some of the part of this source for his book entitled "History of Scind."

Khazain-i Tarikh:

This book is written by Munshi Atta Mohammad. The manuscript of this book is present in the British Museum. It describes Charles Napier's wars with the Baloches in Karachi.¹⁶

Awamik-i-Mughal:

This book is written by Mirza Abdul Qadir Khan. The book gives genealogical trees of Arghuns and the Tarkhans. It also describes the courts of Arghuns and Turkhans.¹⁷ It was written in 1900 and printed from Amritsar in 1902.

Lubb-e-Tarikh-e-Sindh:

It is written by Khan Bahadur Khudadad Khan. This book was first printed at Amritsar in 1900. It was again edited by Dr. N. A. Baloch and printed by Sindhi Adabi Board in 1959. The text has been taken from the *Chachnamah*¹⁸, *Tarikh-e-Masumi*¹⁹, *Beglar Namah*²⁰, *Tarikh-i-e-Tahiri*²¹, and *Tuhfat-ul-Kiram*.²² The chapter on the British rule in Sindh is the original work of the author and probably the only work on first sixty years of the British rule in Sindh consolidated in one book so far published. Since he was himself an eyewitness of the most of the events from 1853 A.D. to 1899 A.D., the '*Lubb-e- Tarikh-e-Sindh*' becomes a contemporary source of information for this period of nearly 50 years. Author has devoted nearly half of the book to the British period.

Khan Bahadur Khudadad Khan, the author of this master-work was originally an Afghan from the 'Tareen' tribe'.²³ At the instance of Hon. H. E.M. James, the commissioner in Sindh, he compiled this book. This book comprises of copious biographical

details covering the period from 1853 to 1899 when the author was in service under the British Government.²⁴ This biographical work is based on the author's personal information.

In Lubb-I-Tarikh-I-Sindh, the author, through frequent references, had deliberately set forth his complete service record, from his first appointment to his retirement including the special duties. He started his service career as a 'munshi' and retired as a 'Mukhtarkar Grade IV'.²⁵

References to the secret missions led by the British officers from Sindh to the neighbouring countries are worthy for the study of the rising British power in further North-West in the sub-continent. Besides the information about the development of the revenue and administrative policies, deliberation about the system of irrigation and communication in Sindh is also expounded in this source. In the end, the summary of the whole work and author's biography has also been given.²⁶

Besides the above-mentioned major work, some other monographs are compiled by Khan Bahadur Khudadad Khan on some particular topics are mentioned below.

Waqa'-e Sair-e Jesalmer :

Khan Bahadur Khudadad Khan compiled an account of his journey in 1859 accompanied Major Frederic Goldsmid to Jesalmer and Pokran in Marwar. They proceeded via Umerkot, spend three months on this mission, and returned to Sindh via Rohri. This book was published in 1900 AD. from Amratsar.²⁷

Makran Namah:

Khan Khudadad Khan wrote a date wise account of his journey accompanied Major Goldsmid to Las Bela and Makran. He also visited Soan Miani, Pasni, Ormara and Gwadar. This account was published in 1862 entitled 'Makran Namah'.²⁸

Khalij Namah:

In 1863 Khudadad Khan accompanied the Commissioner, Mr. Mansfield, from Karachi to the Persian Gulf and from there to Baghdad. He compiled a detailed diary of this journey entitled '*Khalij Namah*' which was published in 1867.²⁹

Pul-Namah:

It is also written by Khudadad Khan in 1887. It is a pamphlet written about Landsdowne Bridge on the Indus, between Rohri and Sukkur, at the time of its opening by the Governor-General of Bombay, Lord Reay. The author accompanied the Governor's entourage along with the commissioner Sir Charles Pritchard on a journey to Quetta, Chaman and Shal Bagh near Qandhar. This is also an account of this entire journey.³⁰

Sayahat Namah:

The author Khan Bahadur Khudadad Khan visited Bombay, Poona, Rojkot, Ahmedabad, Ajmer, Delhi, Amratsar and other places during 1892. He compiled a date wise account of this journey.³¹

Khairpur Namah:

Khan Bahadur Khudadad Khan wrote a monograph on the history of Khairpur state. It gives details of the events in the days of Mir Ali Murad Khan, including his death and dispatch of his body to Karbala. The book was published in 1894 in litho at Karachi and is very rare. It includes a brief account about the administration of political structure and land grants. British Commissioner H.E.M. James took great interest and ordered him to prepare this work. Establishment of this new town and the historical background of Khairpur, from the days of Bahram Khan, who was killed by the Kalhoras have also been the subject of his book.³²

Biaz:

Khan Bahadur Khudadad Khan wrote inscriptions on various graves at Makli graveyard in about 1871. Some inscriptions have disappeared and many graves no longer exist. Pir Husamuddin Rashidi has produced some of the inscriptions in *Makli Namah*.³³

Some other monographs are also said to have been compiled on the historical graveyard of Makli at Thatta entitled 'Makli Namah' written in 1174 AH. This includes information about the important historical heritage of Makli graveyard in Sindh. This book was printed in 1967 by Sindhi Adabi Board in-

cluding a comprehensive introduction and editing by Pir Husamuddin Rashdi.³⁴ Another monograph including his address at the local Ma'sumi Imambargah was published under the title of 'Afsos-Namah'.³⁵

After a thorough analysis of all these sources, the changing trends in Persian historiography can be traced very obviously. With the establishment of the British rule in Sindh, Persian was replaced by Sindhi that was now being considered as an official language.³⁶ Persian gradually lost its importance and development. However, this point may be noted that most of the work written in Persian was compiled at the desire of the British officials. The British took keen interest in the history of India and for this purpose they learnt Persian which was the official language of India and Sindh before their rule. They also made utmost efforts in recording the contemporary events, particularly related to the British rule in Sindh. These historical books chronologically elucidate the important events of the British rule of Sindh starting from its conquest. Mostly the compiled work includes the eyewitness record. Besides the chronicles of contemporary events, some of the work describes the geographical conditions as well and sometimes these are transformed into travel loges.

However, among all these contemporary historians Khan Bahadur Khudadad Khan may be installed on a very significant place. Being one of the key persons employed in the political Department of the Commissioner's office and the nerve center of the British administration in Sindh, he recorded eyewitness records of many events of political importance. References to the secret missions led by the British officers from Sindh are very informative for the study of expansion of the British political power further North-West in the sub-continent. The information recorded about the persons known to him and the places visited are original and valuable. As a loyal servant, the author's work can be considered as an official history of the British Government in Sindh.

During the British rule, the quality of literary work written in Persian language started to be deteriorated due to loss of the royal patronage. Due to this reason, the expression and style of the writing is somehow defective. Almost all the authors concentrated their attention towards the regional history rather than to cover a larger area or the whole British Empire. They also praised

the British government, their liberty of religion, equity of Justice and liberty to every person in learning any art. Besides the chronicles of contemporary events, some of the work describes the geographical conditions as well and sometimes these are transformed into travel loges.

Conclusion:

We learn practical as well as moral lessons from history particularly in terms of governance and administration. It provides guideline for the present and future conduct. The British employed the reputed historians to write the official histories of their reign as their predecessors in this region in order to glorify their achievements and activities.

However, this period was dominated by the British writers but on the contrary the native writers produced a few short accounts on Sindh. Though, the British patronized Persian linguistic and literary activities somehow and tempted the local historians to compile their work in Persian but no serious effort was made to avoid its decaying position. The Persian historical books written in the British period are not to be compared with the classical Persian writing of the medieval era but their importance and significance cannot be underrated. Instead, this period may be signified for printing and publishing of the Sindhi and English books. The era of development of Sindhi language started that was now the official language of the province. Native and British officers translated the Persian original work in Sindhi and English. These changes formed a new shape in development of historiography in Sindh.

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