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Comparative Study of Two Historians- Abul Fazl and Muhnot Nainsee

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Abstract

To understand the literary sources of history, it is inevitable to know wholesomely how the source came into existence, who was the architect, what was his or her persona and understanding about history and history writing, what was the contemporary perception about history etc.? This article is a comparative study of two representative historians of the medieval India namely, Abul Fazl and Muhnot Nainsee. Although there was almost a gap of one generation between the two however the two historians in their personalities and in their action or works have so many common things. Here is the comparison of their similarities and dissimilarities based on their personalities and works, also of their historiography based on their objective, sources of material, attitude of prejudice, sense of history and the utility of their works.

Key words: - Historiography, Historians, Muhnot Nainsee, Abul Fazl , Khyat, Vigat, Ain E Akbari, Akbarnama.

Introduction

Without having, a thorough understanding of the historical perspective of a particular period, a dispassionate historical account and analysis of the times is never possible. The attitude of the historian and his sense of history have always influenced the history of a particular period. Besides this, the historian's personal life has also been found to influence the historical perspective in quite a big measure. This well-established fact cannot be disputed at a time when history is being looked at as a scientific probe. Despite this the conflict between history and historian is continuing. The earlier history - writing was done by various categories of people like discoverers, travelers, courtiers, ambassadors, intellectuals, church missionaries and the admirers. Naturally, the writings of these categories of persons who wrote history have always had an unmistakable gloss or stamp of their personal weaknesses and prejudices and limitations. Still, all said and done, in such history writings we do not miss to note the empiric

accounts along with the materials of history in addition to effective analysis thereof.

History as a discipline came into existence much later. With the advent of professionalism and specialization, the 19th century did come to discipline the history - writing. However, some of the earlier perversions and distortions continued to exist and even some new perversions came to step in¹. However, history-writing has had a long tradition, which we cannot ignore. Unless we analyze the historical tradition, we cannot claim our history-writing enterprise to be complete. By the term analyzing the history, we mean 'The analysis of the historical insight and attitude of the representative historians will be a must, and a thing, which will be imperative². By studying the personality and the deeds of the historians, we cannot only have an idea of their historical insight, attitude and sense, but we can also pave the way of taking history nearer to historical truth.

With this background in our mind we would make a comparative study here of two representative historians of the medieval India

namely, Abul Fazl and Muhnot Nainsee. Both the persons are the representative historians of their times. While Fazl is the most eminent historian of Akbar era, Nainsee happens to be originator of the history of dynasties of Rajputana.

Methodology

At the outset of the study, two questions come to the forefront which not only make this study a challenge but also useful. The first question is; why Fazl and Nainsee were chosen for the study when there was almost a gap of one generation between the two and yet they have been chosen for a comparison? Secondly, why is Nainsee called the *Abul Fazl of Rajputana*? The answer to these questions would form the subject matter of this study.

Results and Discussion

The two historians in their personalities and in their actions or works have so many common things that Nainsee is called 'The Abul Fazl of Rajaputana'³. Where there are quite many similarities in the personalities and works of both historians, yet there are basic differences also. Some facts objectively seen are as follows-

Similarities

Here is some facts about the similarities in the personality and works of Abul Fazl and Nainsee.

Personality

The first similarity was that both of them were historians and men of letters.

Both had served the respective states by working on various posts.

Both had been soldiers as well as Deewan.

Both had enjoyed the confidence of their rulers. Whereas Jaswant Singh was enamored of the high military and administrative efficiencies of Nainsee, Fazl's unmatched loyalty and writing ability brought him very close to Akbar.

Besides the similarities, a very curious coincidence has been that, neither of them died of natural death and both of them became a victim of conspiracies because of their ever-increasing fame and influence⁴.

Works

There is a marked similarity in the content and the nature of their historical writings.

Fazl has given a comprehensive genealogy of the dynasty of Timur and has given an account

of happenings from Adam to Akbar⁵. Nainsee in his Khyat adopted the style of giving an account of genealogy of clans; he commences the account of the various clans' right from their origin. For instance, he initiates the genealogy of Sisodiyas as far back as from Lord Brahma⁶.

In the same way, Fazl's Ain is an extensive gazetteer of the period of Akbar's rule. Nainsee, on the other hand, has given these details in the shape of a gazetteer of Marwar Ra Paragan Ri Vigat⁷.

Differences

Thus it is clear that an account of the similarities of personalities and nature of actions, Nainsee has been described as the Abul Fazl of Rajaputana. At the same time, it goes to establish the justification for choosing the two figures for their comprehensive study. Nevertheless, it would be important and relevant to throw some light on the difference that existed between them.

Personality

Although they were historians as well as literary figures both, yet Abul Fazl was basically a literary figure whereas Nainsee essentially was an administrative authority.

Fazl's fame even today is there as a litterateur and a historian [in which capacity he had a name in the Mughal court]. Nainsee's fame however, came up not as a Khyat or Vigat writer, but as Deewan of the state.

Fazl and Nainsee both while adorning the governmental posts carried out several kinds of important tasks, Fazl took these works only as of secondary importance they were not so important to him, against this Nainsee enjoyed the very prestigious status of Deewanship and was an occupant of a very responsible position.

Although Fazl was occupying the high post of Deewan but Marwar being a small state, the position of Deewan there carried much weight, prestige, importance, and honour. So much so, that in absence of Jaswant Singh Nainsee had to lead several military operations and campaigns successful in order to keep the state solidarity intact.

Another difference was that although both these persons had impressed their respective rulers and had won their confidence yet Fazl's relationship with Akbar remained cordial till end, whereas Nainsee's relation with Jaswant Singh remained lukewarm only so much so that in the end Jaswant Singh doubted Nainsee's integrity and had him arrested⁸.

Fazl basically was a man of literature and a man of Persian language. He has given enough proof of his literary abilities particularly through [his writing] Akbar Nama and Ain. In fact, Akbar Nama was a work full of literary rhetoric. Dr. V.A.Smith writes about his prose style as under; 'His prose style, as we read in Mr. Beveridge's translation of the Akbarnama, is intolerable to me. Simple facts are wrapped in a cloud of almost meaningless rhetoric and an indelible impression'⁹. Nainsee, too, was a scholar of Rajasthani language but he was neither a man of literature of the level of Fazl, nor was his style as literary or figurative or flowery as that of Fazl.

Nainsee has used chaste Rajasthani in his works but he has limited himself to the parlance befitting history, whereas this parlance is missing in Fazl.

Both of these personalities died an unnatural death but whereas Fazl was murdered, Nainsee committed suicide¹⁰.

Works

In his Nama, Fazl has given an account of only Timur dynasty, Nainsee has not kept himself limited to any particular dynasty and has delineated on various Rajput clans and dynasties. Yet another difference was that Nainsee collected the material pertaining to the Khyat and kept on editing the same, but he was never able to give it a final shape and a gloss of his own¹¹. Before he could rewrite it and give it final shape, he left this world for his heavenly abode. It was an unkind for both and for history [as regards the man and as regards history]. As against this Fazl wrote his Nama himself.

In the same way whereas Fazl in his Ain has given a detailed account of twelve Subas of Akbar era, Nainsee has given an elaborate description of seven Paraganas right from the beginning to the 1665 A.D. and subsequently he has made a five year detailed survey of these Paraganas from 1658 to 1662 A.D.¹². Therefore, from the point of view of the scope of details, Vigat is comparatively more important.

There are many other basic differences between the two apart from the ones that have been discussed above¹³.

Comparative study of historiography

After having an idea of these similarities and dissimilarities a natural question that next crops up is as to why was there a difference in their historical perspective and historiography and further in which form and what was the extent of

this difference, and what are their implications if any. Here we are going to analyze the historiography of both the historians with following points-

Objective

The principal difference in the sense of the history of the two personalities was because of the objectives behind their writings. Fazl was a court historian and as such he was expected to, nay, committed to write the words or things of praise, but Nainsee had no such commitment and he was ever a writer of history pure and simple with an eye on bringing out historical truth. Fazl besides being a staunch admirer of Akbar was also at the same time his confidant [man of confidence]. It is very likely that Akbar may have asked Fazl to write a work of this kind¹⁴. Dr. Mukhiya writes, 'this is also suggested by his treatment of the narrative in the Akbar Nama prior to the reign of Akbar.- he hurries through this part, stating occasionally that his main object was to write about Akbar and his reign'¹⁵.

This clearly shows and it is not ruled out that Fazl was keen only on writing about Akbar in a eulogizing manner or say in the manner of a sycophant. This is clearly borne out by the style/diction he uses. The historical matter in Fazl's book is buried in a mass of tedious rhetoric and the author, an unblushing flatterer of his hero, sometimes conceals or even, deliberately perverts the truth¹⁶. Dr. Mathuralal Sharma also endorses the view and states to the effect that, 'this was a case of shameless sycophancy which is proved by the expressions he uses, as for example, Akbar's eyes are like the sun..... His aim is very pure... he has no weakness for and stigma of worldliness... only angles can surmise the extent of his virtue'¹⁷.

Thus Fazl's aim was only to highlight positive and praiseworthy aspects of Akbar's life and career, whereas the aim of Nainsee, as gathered from a thorough study of his Khyat, was to give a detailed and serialized account of all the Rajput clans in a systematic manner based on available historical evidence collected, compiled and edited in the form of his Khyat, and this is exactly why he gives such details of the clan of Sisodiya, Guhil, Chauhan, Rathore, Kacchwaha, Bhati, Parmar, Solanky etc¹⁸. It would be relevant to make it clear here that Nainsee was not given any governmental instruction to do so.

It is his intellectual curiosity and his sense of history and of exploration that he proceeded to undertake this mammoth work and he did it with a great personal touch. Perhaps even Maharaja

Jaswant Singh did not have an idea of the extent and quality of the work he was doing. Clearly, he was not a court historian but a historian in his own right, a historian who was knowledgeable, independent, objective, dispassionate and thoughtful. He was not only wise but also discreet, not only bold but also profound. His history is free of all pressure of extraneous considerations and hence his authenticity as a historian. This was the basic difference between his writings of history and Fazl's writings of history.

Let us now proceed to consider certain other important aspects. When it comes to writing of history two important aspects that confront us are—first, the source or the material of history and the second, the attitude whether prejudiced or neutral. Besides there being difference in their aims, we also come to find difference between the two persons in respect of these two points also namely the material and the attitude.

Source and material

So far as the source and material are concerned Fazl had lot of special facilities at his disposal. He would get any material he wanted at just the drop of a hat. In 1589 A.D. Akbar directed Fazl to write out the history of his regime and his rule, then the Mughal Emperor managed to send for the information relating to various Rajput rulers and various heads of the Rajput states belonging to various clans and their genealogies¹⁹.

In this, a huge library was placed at the disposal of Fazl. Further, in the 19th year of his rule the law relating to Vak- Yat- E- Navisi [also came into being] and so documents, papers etc. connected with record of Amirs and Noble men etc²⁰. were easily made available to Fazl. Therefore, the material that he has used for the compilation of history was quite extensive. In addition, the way, the hard work put in and the scientific policy with which Fazl made use of the material, was just wonderful²¹.

Dr. Mukhiya in this connection stated, 'It would be impossible to analyse the entire Akbar Nama passage by passage and trace the source of information for each. A few examples, however, would show that the author made great efforts to secure information but has seldom acknowledged the source²². Thus, there was no dearth of sources available and he drew luxuriously out from them, but one unpardonable sin is that he never acknowledged the sources. Nama and Ain are full of such instances²³. Dr. Jarrett calls it a Plagiarism²⁴. It is also noteworthy that Fazl made use of the material available to him, at his sweet

will and was prompted by prejudices. Whenever there was, a doubt of a veracity of the certain event, he would refer the matter to and defer the matter for Akbar's opinion and decision. This makes Akbar Nama a purely official history in which Abul Fazl played the role of a distinguished craftsman of his subject whose distinction lay in greatly improving upon the earlier achievements of his craft²⁵.

The case of the Nainsee was just the other way round. Although he was an administrative officer, he never got any governmental patronage and facility for writing history. Yet he tried to compile the sources as far as possible. Nainsee first as far as back in the year 1643, started the writing of and the compilation work of Khyat. He proceeded to compile the material and write history in a planned manner. Between 1643 and 1666 A.D.²⁶, he collected and prepared the preliminary material for Khyat. But, in 1666 A.D. when he was made a prisoner, the work came to stop. He died by committing suicide in the year 1670 A.D. After a lapse of about 173 years, in 1843 A.D. Bithu Panna of Bikaner who had happened to be in possession of the material that had been collected by Nainsee, proceeded to rewrite it and gave it an organised shape of a Khyat²⁷.

It may be recalled that Nainsee during his lifetime engaged himself in exploring as many sources for his work as he could. From this fact it appears that he must have started compiling the material for Khyat soon after he had become the Deewan in 1658 A.D.²⁸. He made extensive use of the ancient sources like inscription on pillars, title deeds, ancient genealogies, old scriptures, bahis, calendars, panchangs and Tamra Patras for writing the history of the Paragnas²⁹.

So far as the use of reference of the sources is concerned it becomes clear from the work of Nainsee namely Khyat that in his writings or creations, Nainsee has adhered to the truth of things. This is the reason why he makes a mention of the basis of the material also. He looks at every event with a rational and logical eye and wherever he finds any contradiction or a state of indecision then he qualifies his statements by non-committal expressions like, 'it is so heard'³⁰ 'it is said'³¹, 'some people say'³², 'it is not known'³³, 'it is yet to be confirmed'³⁴ etc

This kind of attitude towards the sources shows that he remained both analytical and objective towards them. As such when he compiled the material of Khyat he also gave the readers the reference of the sources. This proved of great help when Bithu Panna rewrote the Khyat later in 1843 A.D. In this attempt the references to the basic

material automatically got incorporated in the rewritings³⁵. Thus, it can be said that Nainsee by adopting a positive attitude towards the sources not only referred to them but also made use of them in an objective and unbiased manner.

Attitude of Prejudice

As for the second aspect, namely, the attitude of bias or prejudice, Dr.E.H.Dance has stated as under, "The classical works of history contain as much prejudice as the school text books have"³⁶. Historians and prejudice always go hand in hand. In as much as where subjectivity comes, prejudice will have already made its advent there. So much so that the very selection of a subject entails prejudice. In this context it is important to examine the psychological aspect of Fazl and Nainsee, because it is that alone which can confirm the presence or absence of the prejudice. Fazl was in total allegiance, submission and dedication, towards Akbar. Akbar for him was almost a divine person. He almost had a commitment to Akbar for writing Akbar Nama. Fazl was highly enamoured of Akbar and was almost a God on earth for him. His sense of total surrender and submission for Akbar was not something there out of some pressure or some extraneous consideration; it was a genuine sentiment of submission.

The fact that Fazl describes Akbar's victories as a result more of luck than of his abilities³⁷ shows that his worship for Akbar was a blind worship. The fact that he has not delineated on the negative aspect of Akbar shows that he has a soft corner for Akbar and had a biased approach towards him. Fazl's prejudice was not restricted to Akbar only. He used to frame a picture before any incident took place, and this assumption could be one of the bias or prejudice³⁸ and the prejudice could be positive or negative. For example when he writes about Bairam Khan's murder then he states it as the result of his deeds which he did in the past³⁹.

Exactly contrary to this is the case of Nainsee in that he was not writing history with any particular intention of focusing his stories and facts on any ruler and clan in particular. He had a broad canvas in mind. He wanted to write history of not only the clans of the houses of Rajasthan but wanted to include in his works even distant Rajput houses and dynasties existing all over India⁴⁰. He was not writing history "from the side of somebody". He was an independent and thoughtful person. He was not only bold but also profound. He would always have a thinking and strategy of his own. He had no wasted interest in writing history. His only interest was exploration of facts.

The only accusation regarding bias that can be made against him is that he wrote only on the Rajput ruling houses and clans. This could be ascribed to his academic interest and there is no justification in imputing any motives to him on this ground. He has not shown undeserved praise on Rajputs at the cost of Mughals. For example, his tenor of language and his stance of words used is the same whether it be the account of Jahangir and Rana Amar Singh⁴¹ or that Akbar and Chandrasen⁴² etc. Whenever he adopts an analytical approach or critical attitude he always relies- and relies heavily, on his sources and so the question of any motive or prejudice or bias does not arise. As against this, Fazl miserably lacks this attitude. He does not make a fair comment on the military preparations of Rana Sanga, when he describes it as an act of obstinacy⁴³.

Sense of History

Thus, we find that the two personalities under examination have a different mental makeup. Apart from the difference in mental make-up, there is yet another difference, that of sense of history. Fazl's sense of history was clouded by personal consideration. He was prudent and practical both. In his case the practicality of the man, curiously enough, took better of the two, and so Fazl practical, took advantage of the situation and eulogized Akbar. If we may say so, his one mission in life became to present Akbar before the world in a supreme glory. In terms and components of prejudice and practical approach to writing of history, he forms a class apart when compared with historians like Barni and Badayuni. It may thus be appreciated that the chief interest of Nainsee lay in writing a political history rather than anything else. It appears that while writing all this history Nainsee had in mind the coming generation for whom this material would be a very useful repository of history and culture facts and events, ups and downs. It goes to Nainsee's credit that he chooses to adopt a neutral attitude in order that his account and analysis may dispassionate. He, therefore, kept a special eye on facts as they were. Another point of examination is to know as to what is the extent to which the later historians have drawn from them as sources. Fazl and Nainsee both were historians or reporters of different times and geographical areas.

Importance and Utilization of Works

Amongst the historians of Akbar's times Fazl has undoubtedly a place of his own, and so in order to write a faithful history of Akbar's time,

use or reference to Fazl's works is very important. No doubt the other court historians during the times of Akbar, like Badauni, Barni, Aaftabchi etc were also there, but his scientific study of various sources, a special sense of history and a broad attitude, have gone a long way in helping Fazl to prove himself as a historian with a difference from the rest.

So far as the history of Rajasthan is concerned it was Col. Tod who was the first to have it written and published. However, an important point here is that he was ignorant of Nainsee's work and that is why I have no hesitation in saying that Tod's work remained poorer. By not having knowledge of Nainsee's work, he has missed something very important in his writing career and his life. Had Tod had any access to the facts compiled by Nainsee, Tod's history of Rajasthan would have been a different and more comprehensive one⁴⁴.

In his Khyat Nainsee has elaborately described the various Rajput clans and houses of various kingdoms, but since the validity of history before the days of 15th century is doubtful, it is important to have a pre examination of the same before recognizing it. The later account is true but still its confirmation from a authentic source is important. It may also be noted that the history as contained in Nainsee's Vigat is very important as it relates to social and economical facts emerging out of a five-year survey of Marwar.

During Akbar's reign, there have been several other historians also who gave an account of Akbar's era and regime in brief as well as at length. It follows, therefore, that for the history of the relevant times the works of Fazl alone are not the basic treatises. In Nainsee's case however neither his predecessors nor his contemporaries or successor's right up to Tod ever made an Endeavour at history - writing.

Even the contemporary history writing of his times was limited up to Marwar state alone. This further enhances the importance of Nainsee in as much as for the history of Rajasthan prior to 17th century, Nainsee's Khyat is the solitary fundamental work.

Finally

Although Fazl's significance lay in his wisdom and his communicational skill, Nainsee's

key to success lay somewhere else. Let us advert to Kalika Ranjan Kanoongo's following statement for a clue to that key- '*Libraries and royal patronage may produce an Abul Fazl but not a Nainsee*'⁴⁵.

The statement has much more than meets the eye so far as Nainsee's acumen is concerned.

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