

Book Reviews

Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Indo-Persian Historiography up to the Thirteenth Century*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2010, pp. viii + 208, Rs 795.

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate during the early thirteenth century constitutes a watershed in the history of South Asia. During this period, a predominantly Turkish ruling class conquered vast territories in northern India and erased the remnants of Rajput feudalism. With the aim of legitimizing its power, it sponsored a record of its achievements in the official language, Persian. We are familiar with some of these writings, as these have been employed by modern medievalists to reconstruct the history of the Delhi Sultanate. In the book under review, Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, a distinguished Aligarh-based historian and author of nearly a dozen books, analyses the writings of six historians who lived in northern India during the thirteenth century. At the outset, Siddiqui maps the evolution of historiography in Arabic during the ninth century when the writers assessed the authenticity of facts and eliminated romantic tales. With the beginning of official historiography in the eleventh century, the focus narrowed to the ruler and his court. Persian historiography, which developed in the hands of Gardezi and Baihaqi who documented the history of the Ghaznavids, exercised a strong influence on the Indo-Persian historiography of the thirteenth century.

Fakhr-i-Mudabbir is seen as a writer who carried forward the tradition of Arabic historiography and became a trend setter for Persian historiography in the Indian subcontinent. His family had been associated with latter Ghaznavid rulers, but migrated to Lahore in the wake of invasions of Ghuzz Turks in Ghazni. He began his literary journey with the compilation of *Shajra-ul-Ansab*, which contains 136 genealogical tables pertaining to Prophet Muhammad, caliphate and succeeding Muslim dynasties. To this, he added a prologue which became popular as *Tarikh-i-Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah* and

Tarikh-i-Fakhr-i-Mudabbir. After emphasizing the significance of monarchy, it describes the military success of Sultan Muizzuddin in Ghazni after the ouster of Ghuzz Turks. More importantly, it describes the political career of Qutbuddin Aibak from his appointment as commander of Kuhram and Samana in 1192. It also narrates post-1206 administrative arrangements of Aibak, with reference to the conciliation of local chiefs and management of land grants held by Muslim theologians. It throws interesting light on Turkish tribes of Central Asia, focusing on their social life and cultural mores. Fakhr-i-Mudabbir's second major work, *Adab-ul-Harb wa ash-Shujaa* (Ways of War and Chivalry) was dedicated to Sultan Iltutmish. Treating the Ghaznavid polity as a reference point, it uncovers the functions of state departments like public censor, intelligence, diplomacy, tributes and taxation. It devotes a large space to the modes of warfare and use of horses, including their diseases and cures.

Siddiqui places Ali Kufi's *Chachnama* in the cultural context of northern India during the early thirteenth century. At this juncture, Persian literature received a considerable impetus owing to two factors viz. the adoption of Persian culture by the Turkish ruling class and the migration of people from Persian speaking lands of Khurasan and Transoxiana. The need of the time was to translate Arabic classics into Persian, besides collecting information on the nature of Arab rule in Sind. Ali Kufi, who had been driven to Uch in adverse circumstances, decided to fill the second part of the need. During his search at Arur, he discovered a book on the Arab conquest of Sind, which had been written in the obsolete Hejazi Arabic dialect. He translated the text into Persian and, in the process, added information on the pre-Arab Brahmin dynasty which was based on popular legends. The elevation of the minister Chach to the throne was attributed to his liaison with the queen of Raja Sahasi. Similarly, the execution of Muhammad bin Qasim was attributed to the revenge by the two daughters of Raja Dahir who had been presented to the caliph. Despite these

weak points, Ali Kufi supplements the accounts of Arab writers on the subject. We learn that the migrant Ifafi Arabs served both Raja Dahir and the Arab conqueror. The Arab regime, which was committed to maintain the existing social hierarchy, was advised to adopt non-interference in religious affairs of the ruled.

A migrant from Nishapur, Hasan Nizami was commissioned by Qutbuddin Aibak to record his achievements in northern India. Opening his *Taj-ul-Maasir* with the second battle of Tarain, he provides details about the Jat rebellion at Hansi and Aibak's visit to Ghazni in 1193. He omits the events that occurred between 1197 and 1206 as well the administrative reforms of Aibak that were introduced after 1206. Nizami's lack of interest may be attributed to Aibak's sudden death. As he adopted Iltutmish as his new patron, he resumed the work and carried the chronicle to 1217. However, the exercise was marred by an overpowering desire to glorify the role of Iltutmish and lack of chronological sequence. While describing the events where Iltutmish was present along with Sultan Muizzuddin and Qutbuddin Aibak, Nizami magnifies the image of his patron to the extent of overshadowing his two masters. Not surprisingly, Nizami fails to perceive the enthronement of Iltutmish as usurpation. What is burdensome and irritating, Nizami's prose is extremely verbose and ornate, being loaded with needless similes and metaphors. Yet Nizami's effort is not without merit. The complete texts of royal orders, which were issued by Aibak and Iltutmish to their provincial governors, provide crucial insights into the process of state formation in the nascent Delhi Sultanate. Equally significant are references to the availability of luxury goods that were imported through long distance trade.

A native of Bukhara, Sadiduddin Muhammad Aufo travelled extensively in the different parts of the Islamic world. After serving as a preacher in Nishapur, he joined a group of merchants and took a ship for Cambay. During the course of a visit to Uch, he presented his *Lubab-ul-Albab* (Persian translation of an Arabic anthology on early Persian poets) to Nasiruddin Qubacha. It was at the instance of Qubacha that Aufo assumed the task of writing *Jawami-ul-Hikayat wa Lawami-ul-Rivaayat*. Spread across four volumes and encyclopedic in range, it dealt with the political traditions of various Muslim kingdoms and practices of early Muslim mystics. Prized by Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya and Ziauddin Barani, it served as a source of inspiration for the Delhi Sultans in matters of state policy. Its choice of historical episodes was aimed at underlining the significance of political sagacity, military strategies and spiritual values. Its account of early mystics – including Abu Ishaque Ibrahim bin

Adham, Abu Ali Fuzail bin Ayaz and Abu Saeed Abul Khair – served as a model of piety for subsequent generations of sufis in India. It notes the presence of Muslim merchants in the Chalukya kingdom of Gujarat as well as the Hindushahi kingdom of Punjab and Kabul. It demonstrates the superior military tactics of the Ghaznavids against their Indian opponents, but does not hesitate to expose the weaknesses of the Ghaznavid empire during the post-Mahmud period, as manifested in debased currency and internal conflict in the ruling class. Its anecdotes of the Shansbani rule in India and Khurasan provide insights into the political culture of the age. Though Aufo's first patron was Nasiruddin Qubacha, yet the former fails to provide adequate space to the latter's achievements as an autonomous ruler. In the wake of Qubacha's death (1228), Aufo shifted his loyalty to Nizamul Mulk Junaidi, the *wazir* of Iltutmish. That is why Aufo gives to Junaidi the credit for the political and administrative measures of Iltutmish. In Siddiqui's view, Aufo's account was not only supplementary and corroborative, but also served as a corrective to the histories of Ibn-i-Asir and Juzjani. It also became a model for latter writers like Maulana Fazlullah Binbani, Shaikh Rizkullah Mushtaqi, Abdul Qadir Badauni and Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dehalvi.

Minhaj-i-Siraj Juzjani, the author of *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, is hailed for initiating the trend of writing dynastic history in the *tafaqat* (layers) genre. Juzjani, whose elders served the Ghurid rulers in Afghanistan and Central Asia, migrated to India in 1227. During the course of a long career in the service of the Delhi Sultanate, he held many judicial and ecclesiastical offices, besides headship of seminaries (*madrasas*). In his *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, which spreads across 23 chapters, he offers a comprehensive account of the Muslim dynasties of Iran, Central Asia and northern India. The opening account of prophets mentioned in the Quran is followed up by that of Prophet Muhammad, four pious caliphs and two major caliphal dynasties, Umayyads and Abbasids. As a digression, Juzjani delves into pre-Islamic Iran. Drawing from the classics of Firdausi, Tabari and Maqdisi, he praises the institution of kingship, besides economic and cultural developments. While reconstructing the history of the Muslim dynasties of Iran and Central Asia – Saffarid, Samanid and Buwahid – the focus is on conquests, public works and justice. The history of the Ghaznavids was largely based on the works of Utbi, Baihaqi and Imadi. The achievements of Sultan Mahmud are manifested in his great conquests, magnificent court, grand army and vast resources. The section on the Saljuqids, which is marred by factual errors and popular legends, seeks to glorify the rulers, Malik Shah and Sanjar, but fails to give

any credit to the famous *wazir* Nizamul Mulk Tusi.

The most significant portion of Juzjani's chronicle, comprising last eight chapters, has been devoted to the Khwarizm Shahs, Shansbanis and Mongols. We learn that the polity of Khwarizm was segmentary in structure, as the rulers distributed the territories among their sons who ruled as autonomous chiefs. The account of Shansbanis of Ghur was characterized by freshness and objectivity, though it was composed when there was no surviving ruler who could be flattered in the hope of reward. The achievements of Malikul Jahal and Alauddin Jahansoz are followed by those of the two brothers, Ghiasuddin Muhammad bin Sam and Muizzuddin Muhammad bin Sam. Attention has been paid to the Ghurid interest in monuments and learning, with particular reference to the revival of Ghazni. The description of Ghurid wars against Khwarizm Shah is more detailed than that of their expeditions in northern India. The account of Delhi Sultans, from Qutbuddin Aibak to Alauddin Masud Shah is brief and disappointing. Juzjani employs the technique of criticizing important rulers through subtle hints, because overt negative judgement was impossible. While praising his patrons (Iltutmish and Balban), Juzjani does not fail to appreciate the merits of their rivals. This enables us to revise the existing views on Qubacha, Yaloz, Qutlugh Khan and Imaduddin Raihan. Juzjani's account of the Mongols, with reference to Chingez Khan and his successors, is quite valuable as it is based on personal experience as well reports of merchants and immigrants.

Of all the historians dealt with in this volume, Amir Khusro was the only one to have been born in India. An aristocrat to the core, he was a product of the cultural efflorescence which was manifested in the Delhi Sultanate. He benefited from the scientific rationalism encouraged by the Khaljis, while imbibing a universal humanism owing to a close association with Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya. Though he acquired widespread fame as a Persian poet, he excelled himself in several literary genres and styles. His contribution to Persian historiography can be assessed on the basis of five historical *masnavis* and two prose works. Unlike his predecessors (Fakhr-i-Mudabbir, Hasan Nizami and Juzjani), Amir Khusro shifted focus to social and cultural life and, writing from an Indian perspective, displayed a strong sense of identity with India and Delhi Sultanate. His historical *masnavis* are devoted to political events like the conflict between Sultan Kaiqubad and Bughra Khan, the military campaigns of Sultan Jalaluddin Khalji and the rise of Ghazi Malik to power. They also illumine the cultural life of Delhi, artistic features of the fort of Jhain, techniques of warfare, progress of various sciences and Hindu religious practices. The first prose work, *Khazain-ul-Futuh*, describes the administrative reforms and

military expeditions of Alauddin Khalji, besides the topography of towns. The significance of the second prose work, *Ijaz-i-Khusravi*, lies in specimens of documents – *farmans*, *fatehnamas* and *arzdashts* – offering advice to the ruling class on dealing with the Mongols, *zamindars* and traders. He lauds the measures for price control and advocates religious freedom for non-Muslims. Surprisingly, he disapproves the appointment of low born to public offices, caricatures the Afghans and indirectly criticizes the Deccan policy of the Khalji rulers. In Siddiqui's view, Amir Khusro had little interest in the past and excelled in describing contemporary conditions.

This book is an important contribution to the study of the Delhi Sultanate. It examines not only the content of the major historical writings of the thirteenth century, but also places them in their respective historical contexts. It identifies the outstanding aims and concerns of the writers, with reference to the prevailing system of patronage. It does not hesitate to caution us regarding the prejudices and limitations of the writers. It provides English translations of numerous passages from the original texts, so that we are able to understand their nature, style and importance. The book, while confirming the reputation of Siddiqui as one of the most prominent medievalists of South Asia, promises to illumine the path of students of medieval Indian history.

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B.V. Sreekantan, ed., *Science, Technology and Society*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 2009. Pp. xiv+202, Rs. 350.

The book is a collection of papers presented at a three day national seminar on 'Science, Technology and Society' jointly organized by Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla and National Institute of Advanced Study, Bangalore during 26-28, March, 2006. The aim of the seminar, in the words of the editor "was to bring to focus the series of problems that the Indian Society is facing which are becoming more acute day by day which however can be solved or mitigated to a large extent by judicious and timely application of Science and Technology." The papers have succeeded in realizing this aim.

The area of 'Science, Technology and Society' studies is an established academic discipline in the western universities. The area concerns the interaction between scientific and technological ideas and practices, on the one hand, and the social factors and forces, on the other. Focusing on the Indian context such an undertaking can