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Editing Evaluation and Critical Analysis of Majmu Al Tawareekh

Abstract: The importance of sources, while writing history, can never be underestimated. They help a lot in building and understanding the history of a certain region. We are fortunate to have a plenty of sources available on the history of Kashmir. While some of them stand researched upon by modern historians, there are still others which remain unexplored till date. One among these is Majmu al tawareekh, compiled by Pandit Birbal kachroo during the era of Sikh rule in Kashmir. This Persian Manuscript preserved in different libraries of the world is virtually a mine of information on the socio-economic and cultural life of people during the Sikh epoch in Kashmir. This paper is a modest attempt to sketch in brief the valuable information contained on diverse subjects in this manuscript.

Introduction: Kashmir was thrown from a frying pane into the fire once it passed into the hands of Sikhs as they broke all the records of rack renting. Yet Persian language and literature did not witness a dooms day. Interestingly, enough though not less curiously one finds mushroom growth of Persian poets and

scholars in this epoch. This can be understood only when it is borne in mind that Persian continued to be court language of Kashmir during the period of Sikhs and they did not withdraw the rent free grants from the educated families. We find a large number of Hindu poets and scholars during this period, some of the famous Persian poets and Scholars were Hamidullah shah Abadi (a product of Afghan Period), Mulla Bahaddin Matto, Mirza Mehdi Mujrim, Pandit Birbal Kachroo, Pandit Bhawani Dass, Pandit mukand Ram etc.

An interesting trend developed in Persian literature during the Sikh period was a satirical literature produced by famous historian Pandit Birbal kachroo in the shape of his rare manuscript Majmu al tawareekh. Majmu al tawareekh is prominent with different names in literary circles. Some call it as Mukhtasarul tawareekh, Tawareekh-i-Kashmir, and Majmu-atul-Tawareekh. Majmu al tawareekh is a history of Kashmir to 1251/1835, compiled by Pandit Birbal Kachroo between the period of 1835 to 1846 (A.Q Sarvari: 245-246). It is mainly based upon the earlier Sanskrit and Persian chronicles. It can be broadly categorized in three parts or volumes in the description of its chronology. The First part deals with the age of Hindu rule in Kashmir. Second part is devoted to the Islamic rule in Kashmir and explores the era of Shahmiri, Chak, Mughal and Afghan rule in Kashmir. Third part of the manuscript concentrates upon the Sikh rule in Kashmir, which is also the contemporary

time of writer. Even though the writer is mostly devoted to the political history of Kashmir up to the authors own time, but the manuscript is equally devoted to the geography of Kashmir, the movements, castes, tribes and religious roots. In addition to this Majmu al tawareekh has an equal focus on socio-cultural and moral issues of the epoch (Kilam: 1852 . Birbal Kachroo has equally focused on economic issues and circumstances of his times as well.

Editing of Majmu al tawareekh: The manuscript, of majmu al tawareekh, is still preserved in and outside the state of Jammu and Kashmir in different academic and state libraries. As per our research is concerned two copies of this manuscript are still preserved outside the country in Bodelian (Library No. 1973) and Lahore library of British museum and Pakistan respectively. In the course of this research we have fetched nine manuscripts of Majmu al tawareekh among which seven (7) manuscripts are preserved in research and publication centre of Allama Iqbal Library University of Kashmir with the following accession numbers; 14, 130,935, 2876,2317,1363,3228, while two (2) manuscripts are preserved at Maulana azad library, Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh with sulaiman collection number of 657/35 and University Collection Akhbar No. 148. Some of these manuscripts are incomplete like with folio numbers of 935, 1363,3228.

There is no mention of writers/authors name and date of

plagiarism in any of the manuscripts. There is slight difference between the contents of these manuscripts. Only the hard Persian language is replaced with easy and colloquial language of Persian, which hardly changes the meanings of discourse.

Evaluation and Critical Analysis:

Majmu al tawareekh by Pandit Birbal Kachroo, is in many ways a pioneering work and contribution. It is among the few hard working attempts to document the history of Kashmir. Even so it is remarkable for its two outstanding features; First it stuck to the truth and tried neither to paint it black nor whitewash it. Secondly, it is not pessimistic but tries to draw lessons for the future in words pregnant with aptness and prescience.

Its style, content, technique and method adheres to the principles of historiography and that way it is a valuable addition to the body of historical literature available on the 19th century Kashmir. It, like most of other historical manuscripts, too begins with the early history of Kashmir for which it draws upon information provided by earliest Sanskrit and Persian works. Kachroo adds his own information on history and culture of Kashmir society of his contemporary times. For this, his work can be regarded as a useful source of Kashmir's history along with its polity, economy, and society during the periods of sultans, Mughals, Afghans and Sikhs. Majmu al tawareekh narrates political developments in a proper chronological order and corroborates authors own observations with other contemporary works.

About Mughal rule in Kashmir birbal Kachroo acknowledged that it is essentially a military despotism, but also admitted that it is not of the variety witnessed during the regime of the Delhi sultans who preceded the Mughals. For him, the despotism of the Mughal rulers, though military in character, was yet benevolent. They did not remain content with only winning fresh territories or maintaining peace and tranquillity in the realm, but were always solicitous for their subjects. Praise has been bestowed upon them for their achievements and secular character, as Kachroo writes;

☆ *"Many Central Asian fruits were thus introduced in the country; and many gardens were laid in Kashmir during this period. Wherever one may go in Kashmir, a mughal garden in ruins will be there with a grove of chinars to proclaim in mute eloquence the past glory of the place. The subedar̄s while following in the footsteps of the emperors vied with each other in laying gardens. During this period, seven hundred gardens are estimated to be laid."*

☆ *"Anantnag was the place wherefrom trade was directed with India and Jammu, Bhadrawah, Kishtwar and other places."*

☆ *"The habit of taking tea which is now universal in Kashmir was imbibed during mughal period following contacts with the Taliban traders who had themselves taken it up from Chinese."*

☆ *"Even during the reign of Aurengzeb, the pundits occupied a very high place in the country and the mansabs were*

sold in Kashmir at very cheap rates. Besides, cattle, cocks and eggs were imported and distributed amongst the people free of cost. Even cows and pigeons were brought in. Dues from the cultivators which had been outstanding against them since the Afghan times were written off. Ganesha Pandit Dhar made an assessment of the land, and then distributed it amongst the farmers, in an equitable manner. The result was that within two years the price of shall per khirwar came down from sixteen rupees to one rupee. Besides, the judicial administration was also reorganized and put under Pandit Raja Kak Dhar."

☆ "But the shawl trade, which was the main source of the country's wealth, was at standstill, as most of shawl weavers had during the recent famine migrated to such places as Amritsar, Ludhiana and Basoli in Jammu. In the Jammu province, the weavers were very much encouraged by Maharaja Gulab Singh, who had occupied Kishtwar which opened a shorter though a difficult route to Ladakh wherefrom the wool for shawls came. With the shawl weavers well settled in Jammu province, the Maharaja's attempt was to divert raw wool direct to Jammu through his newly acquired district of Kishtwar. In this, he succeeded to a considerable extent. The result was that the shawl industry of Kashmir was considerably damaged. Only a few years earlier, there were about twenty two thousand looms working which came down to not more than twenty two hundred."

☆ *"Troops were also raised from the frontier muslim tribes. A terrible famine occurred in Kashmir during these very few days. Various measures were adopted by him to successfully cope with the calamity. He ordered a census of the whole population of Srinagar, and on that basis he issued ration slips to the people. The names of the inmates of a household were noted on the ration slips and these were issued to the head of the household. The rations were supplied to the people from state granaries at the rate of one anna a seer. To the peasantry he made a taqavi grant of a lac of kharwars of paddy for seeds."*

A historical work should, above all be factual and objective. It is unfortunate but true that the fair Vale of Kashmir has received more than its due share of bloody conflict, ethnic warfare, religious strife and political intrigue. Blood has sullied the rivers and lakes of the Valley again and yet again. It is no use pretending that the Hindus did not persecute the Buddhists or that the Sikhs did not tyrannize the Hindus and Muslims. Birbal Kachroo has unshakably clung to the facts, howsoever unpalatable these are. In addition to it Kachroo also unlike most of other historians did not hide the exceptional accounts of the Sikh regime. Even though he is mostly devoted to the political history of Kashmir up to the his own time, but the manuscript is equally to some extent devoted to the geography of Kashmir, the movements, castes, tribes and religious roots. The role of the exploitative classes, the ruling elite, grain dealers and other

hoarding groups also engage Birbal Kachru's attention in the Majmu al tawareekh. Drawing comparisons between native and alien rulers, the chronicler terms the Afghan rule as ruthless and unjust. He castigates their taxation policy as it was oriented towards draining the resources from Kashmir to Kabul which eventually subjected the masses, both hindus and Muslims, to extreme exploitation and poverty⁴. As Kachroo writes;

But other pundits of historical accounts have different accounts for the same; As regards Pandit Birbal Kachru as a historian, Pir Ghulam Hassan Khuhani, in his Tarikh Hasan V. I at page 376 say, that in the domain of research and truthful accounts, Birbal Kachrus history is a bundle of lies and concoctions and biased against Muslims.

However through a careful study of the contents of his work, it appears that for him history was nothing more than mere narration of events of kings, their nobles, sufi saints, and the domineering groups and factions of feudal chiefs. The most glaring defeat one could feel while going through the pages of Majmu al Tawareekh is that much interest for common folk does not figure in it. We hardly get to know anything about the common Kashmiri society of that time. Birbal Kachroo does not record the participation of the common masses in happenings crucial to their interests and lives. As a corollary to it the text of Majmu al Tawareekh is devoid of any personal remarks of the author about the nature of history.

Conclusion: Unlike the history of many societies the history of Kashmir is not wrapped in mystery or has not to be splinted out from archeological or architectural evidences or from the travel accounts of foreigners only. Instead Kashmir's past is carefully preserved in recorded accounts of different languages that include Sanskrit and Persian in particular. In this direction while as volumes have been written to highlight the relevance of different historical manuscripts, one can, however not ignore Majmu al tawareekh of Pandit Birbal Kachroo for its coverage of our lengthy past and recorded with perfect care and authenticity. Contribution of Pandit Birbal Kachroo as historiographer is too immense to be scaled by any measure. He is one of the legends who started the process of exploring facts about Kashmir history from early times and analyzing these along systematic lines. While doing so, he strived to be as honest and transparent as possible. Nevertheless, a certain degree of subjectivity did overtake him while recording facts partly because of his association with the Brahman community (As a Kashmiri pandit). But, that, however does not undervalue the significance of his invaluable works of Kashmir history, art, culture, religion etc. In this manner, he bequeathed a rich treasure of historical literature which was significant on two counts: one it sensitized the future writers to the essentials of historiography and second, it helped in forging unity between the Kashmiri pandits and Muslims.

This research paper is a modest attempt in the direction to draw

the attention of contemporary scholars and historiographers towards the contents of the manuscript of majmu al tawareekh which are relevant even today, not only by way of filling the void but also provide valuable source material on the past history of Kashmir. It further provides background to the current turmoil of this illustrious and oppressed Kashmir community, which is of considerable pertinence. While giving a broad picture with mixed touches this manuscript covers wide range of the struggle of Kashmir community in the course of history. In conclusion Kachru's account of Majmu al tawareekh remains a significant and distinguishable contribution to Kashmir historiography of the medieval period.

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