

...total absence of research and authentication meant that... was to be no increase of historical knowledge, and that the... of the knowledge imparted would always be open to question. Indo-Muslim historiography only serves to mark the decline... critical standards of Islamic historiography.

Narrowness of Scope

Lastly, historiography of the Sultanate period suffered from extreme narrowness of scope. Early Indo-Muslim historians... history revolve round the great men of religion... government—prophets, sultans, nobles and saints. It never... down to the life and conditions of the common man, the poor... and the lost. The religious orientation of the works had... effect of further narrowing their scope to the campaigns... adventures of Muslim political and military chiefs in an infid... country. The large majority of the population—the Hindus... figured only on the fringe of such works as infidel enemies... understand whom the great Al-Biruni had stayed back in India... written a marvel of a book.

MEDIEVAL MUSLIM HISTORIOGRAPHY:
II. THE MUGHAL PERIOD

In the Mughal period a new kind of historiography—that of official histories or *namahs*—came into vogue in India under Persian influence. Akbar introduced the practice by commissioning officials or others to write the history of his new empire giving them access for this purpose to state archives. The practice continued down to the reign of Aurangzeb who, however, stopped it in his eleventh regnal year. Besides such official histories, biographical works of great historical interest were also produced during the period under review. And we are not entirely dependent upon chroniclers; we have in some instances contemporary, independent historians.

1. Royal Autobiographers

The Mughal period is important for the memoirs of rulers as well as of private individuals. Though not avowed histories, they are literary works of great historical interest. The most important

...are the *Tuzuk* or *Babur-namah*, the autobiography of Babur, and the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*.³⁴ Babur's *Tuzuk* has been rightly recognized as an indisputable historical source of great literary merit. Beveridge considers it one of those priceless records comparable to the confessions of St. Augustine and Rousseau and the memoirs of Newton and Gibbon.³⁵ Babur claims that he has written "only the plain truth," and "has spoken of things as they happened," and to have "described... every good or bad act" of all "with the most perfect impartiality."³⁴ His statements abound, and the historical events in the *Tuzuk* are strikingly mixed up with the author's own opinions, sentiments, judgments and philosophy of life.³⁵ Events are described in their chronological and geographical setting. Babur ascribed his success in India to the mercy of God, and the weakness of India to her inherent disunity. But the country where he was setting up his dynasty had few pleasures to recommend it. Yet, it had three advantages: its large size, the very pleasant climate during the rains, and the abundance of workmen of every profession and trade. The conqueror informs us that the country from Bhera to Bihar yielded a revenue of fifty-two crores. Of the people Babur paints a morbid picture. Their sparse fishing catches the foreigner's eye. Their peasants and the lower classes all go about naked. They die on a thing which they call a *langoti*... The women, too, have a *lang*, one end of it they tie about their waist, and the other they throw over their head.³⁶

"The people of India," Babur wrote, "have no idea of the charms of a friendly society, of frankly mixing together or of familiar recourse."³⁷ He found the whole of Agra ugly and detestable where however he erected buildings and planted trees. Till the end, the founder of the Mughal empire cherished a desire to go back to his spiritual home—Kabul and Central Asia. The *Tuzuk* makes its author a great writer of Turki prose. The simplicity of its style goes well with its honesty and sincerity. The only defect of the work is its gaps. Elliot and Dowson say:

Babur's *Memoirs* form one of the best and most faithful pieces of autobiography extant; they are infinitely superior to the

hypocritical revelations of Timur and the declaration of Jahangir—not inferior in any respect to the Expedition of Xenophon and rank but little below the Commentaries of Caesar.³⁸

Emperor Jahangir has also left us an account of himself and his reign in his *Memoirs*, the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, a work which is less interesting than that of Babur. Of the three versions of the *Memoirs*, the most authentic is the one which covers the first twenty years of Jahangir's reign written by the emperor himself. Fearing the health compelled Jahangir to appoint Mutamad Khan, the emperor's military secretary, to do the work under his supervision. The latter parts were re-edited in the time of Muhammad Shah.

The *Memoirs* are a priceless record of the end of Jahangir's reign. Jahangir's reign and are distinguished by their frankness and lucidity. A man of no common ability, Jahangir honestly records his weaknesses and confesses his faults with candor. Calmly and honestly does he tell us that he got Abul Fazal murdered; but he is rather smooth-tongued in the references to his revolt as prince and to his relations with Prince Khusrav and Sher Afghan. He does not at all mention his marriage with Nur Jahan. Besides such personal references which are of great value for a study of Jahangir's character, are the many accounts of political, administrative and military transactions. More, the *Memoirs* are rich in details about the social, cultural and spiritual life of the period and in the observations of the emperor about men and manners. Also, they contain descriptions of epidemics and certain strange occurrences in the empire.

2. Historiography during the Reign of Akbar (1556-1605)

The Timurid love of history blossomed in Akbar in whose reign four histories were written besides other works of historical interest. Of the four, two were official histories written at the instance of the emperor himself. They are the *Tarikh-i-Alfi* (*Millennial History*) and the *Immunal Akbar-nama*. By the time the *Akbar-nama* was issued from the hand of the great Abul Fazal, two unofficial histories had been written of the reign of the great emperor—

of fact *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* of Nizam ud-Din Ahmad, and the *Muntakhab-ur-Tauarikh* of Abdul Qadir Badauni. The two histories are important for a proper understanding of Akbar's reign. They serve as necessary correctives to the overlaudatory account of Abul Fazal.

Tarikh-i-Alfi (1591)

Badauni informs us that in 1582 Akbar ordered the writing of the *Tarikh-i-Alfi* which was to be a comprehensive history of the first millennium of Islam, then drawing to a close. Work on the *Millennial History* began in 1585. The history of the first thirty-five years of Islam after the death of the Prophet was written by a team of seven scholars of all shades of opinion. The board included Nizam-ud-Din Ahmad and Badauni. Mulla Ahmad of Thatta sought the work from the thirty-sixth year to the time of Chengiz Khan when the author was murdered. The rest of the work was brought up to the year 1585-87 by Asaf Khan. In 1591, the millennium year, Badauni on the orders of the emperor, corrected the arrangement of dates etc. in the first two parts. The *Alfi* name was likewise corrected by its author, Asaf Khan.

Sources and Chronology

Akbar had ordered that the work should attain a very high degree of objectivity and perfection. He himself supervised the progress of the work. H.M. Elliot and John Dowson have certified that the compilers apparently availed of all the best sources of information open to them, often applying judicious criticism in sifting the most trustworthy information from records which contained many fabulous legends. And Badauni attests that Akbar did not approve of the legendary material being incorporated in the work.³⁹ The history of Babur is based on the *Tuzuk-i-Baburi*, but that of Humayun and Akbar, at also of Persia, Central Asia and Turkey, are based on information available in the imperial archives, and on those collected from oral evidence of eminent nobles and other people.

The work is arranged strictly in the chronological order. Events are recorded year by year beginning with the first years of Prophet Muhammad's death. While the history of the Indian Timurids has

dealt with at some length, S.A.A. Rizvi feels that adequate justice has not been done to the Sultans of Delhi.

Importance of the Tarikh-i-Alfi

Apart from whatever intrinsic merit the *Tarikh-i-Alfi* may have had it had a significance for Indian history. Its concluding portions constitute the first official history of Akbar's reign, compiled under the emperor's own supervision. Nizam ud-Din Ahmad based his account of Humayun's reign mainly on the *Millennial History* and extensively drew upon it for his *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*. Moreover, Rizvi remarks that the work "prepared the people for adjusting themselves to the new values of life which were gaining increasing importance on account of Akbar's policy of 'peace with all'."⁴⁰

✦ Nizam ud-Din Ahmad: *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* (1593)

Hailing from a family with an honorable tradition of public service under the first two Mughals, Khwaja Nizam ud-Din Ahmad rose to be *bukhsh* or military secretary of the empire under Akbar. His *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* was completed in 1593 and the author died the next year. Badauni writes: "Khwaja Nizam ud-Din left a good name behind him. There was not a dry eye at his funeral call to mind his person who did not on the day of his funeral call to mind his excellent qualities."⁴¹

Sources

Nizam ud-Din's preface states that history strengthens the understanding of men of education and affords instruction by examples to men of observation. At the outset of his work, he mentions twenty-eight works as his sources. Besides such chronicles, he helped himself with hearsay, reports of individual informants and personal observation. But he never questioned the veracity of the information supplied to him. The sources are copied in summary.⁴²

Form and Content

The *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* in three volumes is a history of nine regions and of the first thirty-eight years of Akbar's reign. The nine *tabaqat* (regions) are—Delhi, the Deccan, Gujarat, Bengal, Malwa,

Bihar, Sind, Kashmir and Multan. Within this regional framework Nizam ud-Din writes dynastic history of each of these regions to the time of its conquest by Akbar. Within a dynasty each region is a separate unit. But the account of the thirty-eight years of Akbar's reign is written in the form of an annual chronicle, meticulously maintaining the chronological order of events.

The contents of the work comprise information on accession of rulers to the throne, their wars, rebellions of the nobles, etc. but other aspects of political history like politics and administrative measures find almost no mention. Toward the end of the work Nizam ud-Din gives us some information about the length and breadth of Akbar's empire, its revenue, and the 3,200 towns it contained of which 120 were great cities.

Defective Ideas of Historical Causation and Explanation

The regional framework and the dynastic and annalistic treatment of history precluded even a suggestion of tracing causal relationship. Even when the author comes to the reign of Akbar, he confines himself narrowly to the narration of political history. The focus of this narration is Akbar and his conquest and consolidation of Hindustan into a viable empire. It is treated not as a result of any process directed by a force within or outside history. Mulhia writes that history for Nizam ud-Din Ahmad is a narration of individual isolated events rather than a study of their causes.⁴³ For example, the dismissal of Bairam Khan by the budding emperor is treated as just an event. Again, the very important process which culminates in the signing of the *Mahzar* (Petition) is given half a page without going deep into Akbar's religious evolution and the conflict with the *ulama*. So also the introduction of the *harari* system is narrated as a simple event without relating it to the administrative and constitutional change it inaugurated. Yet within these limitations Mulhia observes a significant departure—the subordination of personalities to events. The emphasis is on events, not on person

Assessment

The *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* was treated as a standard history by subsequent writers freely borrowed from it. Erskine regarded the author as "perhaps the best historian of the period."⁴⁵ Nizam ud-Din's language and style are simple and his *History* is compl

...from value judgements. But Harbans Mukhia, concluding a threadbare analysis of the work has written: "The narrative of individual events rather than evaluation...may have been taken for objectivity. For the present day historian, however, this may prove to be its [*Tabaqat*'] chief weakness."⁴⁶ Mukhia thinks that the conception of writing regional, provincial histories is Nizam ud-Din's greatest single contribution to the historiography of the sixteenth century.

Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni (1540-1596):
Muntakhab ul-Tawarikh

Background

Badauni regretted having been born at all, but consoled himself that the unfortunate incident took place during the reign of Sher Shah whom he describes as 'destroyer of the infidels', an epithet which in fact was unjust to the great Afghan sovereign. Abdul Qadir was born in August 1540 at Todah, brought up at Bhusawar, while Badauni seems to have been his parental home. He studied first under Shaikh Hatim Sambhali and later under the famous Shaikh Mubarak along with Faizi and Abul Fazal. Faizi testifies to Badauni's vast and varied learning. The historian mentions his second marriage (1567), but not the first. In 1574 Badauni was presented to Akbar at Agra. It was the time when the young, determined emperor was feeling uneasy about the pretentious dominance of the *ulama*. "As learning was a merchandise much in demand," says Badauni, "I had the privilege of being addressed [by His Majesty] as soon as I reached his presence."⁴⁷ The intrepid scholar easily challenged the spurious profundity of the *ulama* and Akbar was pleased. Badauni was appointed *imam* (priest) for prayer on Wednesdays on account of his sweet voice, and was given thousand *bighas* of land—a goodly gift.

But the intimacy between the sovereign and the scholar turned into estrangement. Akbar began to suspect that Badauni was a fanatic. The springs of Badauni's bitterness were personal and religious. Abul Fazal who had followed him to court now far outdistanced him in imperial favor. And Badauni saw the faith ebbling from the emperor's heart and thought that it was in danger. The discussions in the *Badat Khana* ('Hall of Worship' built by

Akbar for the purpose of discussing religious and philosophical problems) had so planted doubts in Akbar's mind that loss of faith in Islam itself was only a matter of time. The *ulama* were banished, and Akbar assumed supremacy in spiritual matters as well. And disregarding the scholar's religious susceptibilities the emperor thrust on him the task of translating the holy books of the Hindus. Badauni's bitterness found vent in a language which at times verged on obscenity.

Badauni's intense zeal for his faith was inseparable from his hatred of Sufism, the Shias, the Hindus, and the liberalism of Shaikh Mubarak and his sons—Faizi and Abul Fazal. He adopted rigidly orthodox attitudes towards the new flexibility, the more liberal thinking, initiated by Akbar's policies. He criticized everything that Akbar did—not only such religious and social reforms as fixing the age of marriage and establishing poor houses, but administrative measures like the branding of horses and the Mansabdari system. He would condemn Akbar and his program for the benefit of posterity in his *Muntakhab* which he wrote in secret lest he should bring down the wrath of the emperor-prophet. The work must have occupied the author for five years before he completed it in 1596. He died the same year.

Sources

The inducement to write the *Muntakhab*, Badauni announces, was his "sorrow for the faith, and heart-burning for the deceased Religion of Islam."⁴⁸ The *Muntakhab ul-Tawarikh* is a history written with a vengeance intended to give a 'true' version of the anti-Islamic 'heresies' and 'innovations' of Akbar's reign.⁴⁹ To Badauni, history was a noble science and instructive art, but he warns that taken as a rational science, its study and contemplation might lead the shortsighted "into deviation from the straight path of Muhammad."⁵⁰ Badauni mentions only the *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* o Nizam ud-Din Ahmad and *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi* of Sarhindt as the sources from which he derived his information to which, he says, he added something of his own.⁵¹ But he consulted diverse sources like Mirbhai's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, Barani's *Tarikh-i-Fir* *Shahi*, and Amir Khusrav's *Ashiqat*. The second volume of *it Muntakhab*, which contains Badauni's reactions to the events of Akbar's reign, is written mostly on the basis of his first han

...knowledge. To such information he adds his own thoughts on what he thinks to be the thoughts of others. "In this respect," says Harbans Mukhia, "Badauni does not merely adapt information to conform to his object; he creates it."⁵² Yet he does not seem to tell untruths to gain his point.

Form and Content

The *Muntakhab* is written in three volumes. The first volume is a formal political history from Subuktigin to Humayun, written in the form of reigns in strict chronological order. But the narrative is disproportionate to the importance of the rulers. Balban gets five pages while a political non-entity like Kaiqubad is honored with eight. Badauni admires Sher Shah, but his reforms do not receive attention at all. The second volume comprises the events of the first forty years of Akbar's reign set in the form of an annual chronicle. The third volume consists of a series of biographical sketches of the *ulamā*, the physicians and poets of Akbar's court. There are somewhat detailed accounts of the *karori* system and of the branding of the horses, but the Mansabdari system and of the administration receive little attention. But Badauni's account is our chief contemporary source for the religious and philosophical discussions in the *Ibadat Khana*, and the account is given first hand. The historian disliked Akbar's eclecticism and was disgusted with the emperor's patronage of men of different persuasions to the detriment of the Muslims who, he thought, had the sole title to government office and preferment. There are accounts of famine and earthquakes, the *janhar* at Chitor, and of some of the buildings the author had seen.

Historical Causation

Of causation in history, Badauni thinks that the individual acts not in the background of any historical situation, but according to his nature, motives and will. The source of all action is the individual will which creates historical events. Akbar welcomed Abul Fazal to his court because he expected to find in him a man "capable of teaching the *ulamā* a lesson."⁵³ It is in human volition, the belief that men act of their free will, that Badauni establishes historical causation. It is for this reason that he is so bitter against Akbar and all those who were instrumental in 'corrupting' his mind. For this

reason, Badauni's attack on his adversaries is invariably of a very personal nature.⁵⁴

Subjectivity

Perhaps the most important feature of the *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh* is its chronic subjectivity, for its author wrote under great emotional stress created by what he thought was the organized undermining of Islam by Akbar and his sycophants. His highly personal views and interpretation of historical events were devoid of historical perspective. Value judgements abound and the *shariat*, the mainstay of Muslim life was the sole criterion of judgement for him. Harbans Mukhia shows how his judgements are theologically oriented. Of the one and a half pages given to Hakim ul-Muk Gilani, exactly same words are devoted to his medical accomplishment, the rest to his postures in disputes between the *ulamā* and the physicians. And medicine being a 'rational' science, Badauni thoroughly distrusts its efficacy. His value judgements are entirely negative, emotional and personal, and made always from the religious point of view. He poured his ire into the *Muntakhab* which castigated Abul Fazal, Faizi and Akbar. Badauni's account of Abul Fazal's life is a classic in literary abuse,⁵⁵ but it is rendered tolerable when we hear him maliciously condemning to hell Faizi, a friend who had always helped him and never offended him. Faizi

...continued to blaspheme in his dying moments, and...at last, he barked like a dog, while his face became disfigured, and his lips black, as if he already bore the impress of the damnation that awaited him.⁵⁶

And, yet, the historian claims that it was not his habit to record the faults of others.⁵⁷ Akbar and Abul Fazal escaped similar descriptions of their deaths for Badauni died before them. According to Khafi Khan the publication of the *Muntakhab* was suppressed by Jahangir.

Style

Badauni's feeling conditioned his style, a feeling not harnessed by reason. The language is racy and outspoken, and feeling sometimes carried it to the verge of obscenity. "Consequently," writes Harbans Mukhia, "the *Muntakhab* vibrates with life and emotion and it is a

readable, if not an equally reliable, work.⁵⁸ Often the language is pithy, epigrammatic, packed with meaning. Hear the medieval Indian Miere making fun of physicians: "If knowledge of medicine could prolong life, physicians should never die." About all the world knows Badauni's description of Muhammad Tughlaq and their king: "The king was freed from his people and the people from

Assessment

In a final assessment, we have to say that Badauni's *Muntakhab* is not wholly reliable and that it suffers from many faults, but we also have to add that it supplements and corrects the overlaudatory *Akbar-namah*. The bitter historian comes to our aid in regard to some crucial pieces of information which Abul Fazal glosses over as unfavorable to the reputation of Akbar. For instance, Badauni's description of the terrible suffering of the ryots which the *harsiy* system of land revenue entailed. Again, Badauni's account of Akbar's religious evolution is of inestimable value. He tells us of the emperor's alert mind which speculated on most questions known to man, and of his spiritual yearnings which led him to spend whole nights and long hours of the day in contemplation and meditation. Even in his bitter lament for his faith Badauni does not seem to tell an untruth. Hear him:

Innovators and schismatics artfully started their doubts and sophistries, making right appear to be wrong, and wrong to be right. And His Majesty [Akbar] who had an excellent understanding, and sought after the truth, but was surrounded by low irreligious persons, to whom he gave his confidence, and the object of his search was lost. The ramparts of the law and of the true faith were broken down; and in the course of five or six years, not one trace of Islam was left in him.⁵⁹

Abul Fazal (1551-1602):
'Akbar-namah' and 'Ain-i-Akbari'

The Emperor and the Historian

The greatest among the histories sponsored by kings and financed by the state are Abul Fazal's twin works, the *Akbar-namah* and the

Ain-i-Akbari. Abul Fazal was born in Agra in January 1551, son of Shaikh Mubarak, in a Hejazi family that had migrated to India and settled at Nagaur near Ajmer. Inheriting from his father and grandfather the tradition of mysticism and toleration, of universal learning and cosmopolitanism, under the tutelage of his father Abul Fazal grew into an erudite scholar. Presented to Akbar in 1574 by his brother, the poet Abul Faizi, the young scholar quickly rose to high position at the imperial court with his vast learning and arduous devotion to the emperor. He was Akbar's *alter ego*, more powerful than the prime minister, and he became the high priest of the *Dein Ilahi*. Abul Fazal's gargantuan appetite is said to have called for thirty pounds of food a day. He married four women, including a Hindu. But his power and position had earned him enemies. In 1602 he was cruelly murdered by Bir Singh at the instance of the emperor's son, Prince Salim (later Emperor Jahangir), who admits his crime in his *Memoirs*. Anger and grief assumed Akbar who refused to appear in public for three days. No historian has been so honored by a sovereign.

Form

Abul Fazal was directed by his imperial master to "write with the pen of sincerity the account of the glorious events and of our dominion increasing victories."⁶⁰ Few historians could have been written from a wider background of education and experience, few prepared more diligently, elaborately and conscientiously than the *Akbar-namah* and the *Ain-i-Akbari*. Besides being a scholar, Abul Fazal was a man of affairs who could understand the behavior of states and the course of history. He was Akbar's friend and adviser, minister, diplomat and military commander. The work, begun in 1595, was completed and submitted to Akbar in 1602.

In form, the *Akbar-namah* and the *Ain-i-Akbari* are twin complementary works—the *Ain* describing Akbar's experiments and institutions; the *Akbar-namah* endeavoring to explain the spirit behind those institutions. The *Ain*, the descriptive record of Akbar's empire, is divided into five books. The arrangement of the *Akbar-namah* is regnal, each reign being treated as a unit in which each event forms an individual entity. When the author comes to the reign of Akbar, the book assumes the character of an annual

...nicle, the events of each year being described strictly in the sequence of their happening.

The second volume of the *Akbar-namah* contains at length Abul Fazal's views on history. The greatest historian of medieval India thought that the study of such history as had been written in the Sultanate period was a waste of time. He was convinced that properly written history embodying the experiences and achievements of man was a positive source of inspiration.⁶¹ He said history "a unique pearl of science which quiets perturbations, physical and spiritual, and gives light to darkness external and internal."⁶² History embodies the knowledge of mankind, and the singularities of human existence, and consoles the unfortunate and the grieved. Perhaps thinking of what he himself was doing for Akbar, Abul Fazal writes: "It is evident that of mighty monarchs of old, there is no memorial except in the works of the historians of the age and no trace of them but in the chronicles of eloquent and judicious annalists."⁶³ Realization of truth, which is the goal of human life, can be achieved only by the light of reason, and reason is nourished by a study of the past. Therefore, in spite of the obvious limitations of history, it was worth cultivating.

View of Indian History

From such a general conception of history, Abul Fazal came to a new and broader view of Indian history inspired as much by his rationalist-liberal attitude as by his master's new conception of the Mughal empire. The empire that Akbar was sedulously building was different in nature from the Sultanate; it was envisioned as a truly Indian empire, a national whole, an empire of partnership with the Hindus, and no longer — as the Sultanate had been — the government of an alien racial and religious group imposed on the millions of the native population. Abdur Rashid observes that the political, social and intellectual ferment of the age of Akbar, and the novel character of the empire envisioned and initiated by him, called for an academic propaganda to sustain it.⁶⁴ And, with his liberal views on religion and politics, none could have performed the task better than Abul Fazal. Representing the need for reason and religious toleration against the entrenched obscurantism of the *ulama*, Abul Fazal provided the moral and intellectual basis for the emperor's unorthodox policies.

Abul Fazal performed his task by: First, effecting a departure from the historiography of the Sultanate period. He employed a rational approach to history. He makes no reference to the generally accepted view of Muslim historians that history only served to enlighten and warn 'believers'.⁶⁵ Second, Abul Fazal's assessment of the Indian situation was rational and political whereas that of his predecessors was religious. N.A. Siddiqi writes:

He refused to agree with the view held by his predecessors that Indian history essentially constituted a record of the struggles between the forces of Islam and Hinduism. For Abul Fazal the conflict was between the Mughal Empire and the Indian Princes, Hindu and the Muslim alike. In essence, it was a conflict between the forces of stability, consolidation and good government under an ideal monarch who was qualified to lead the people in temporal as well as spiritual affairs, and the forces of disintegration and bad government led by the Zamindars.⁶⁶

Third, Abul Fazal again departed from the medieval Muslim — he did not believe that Indian history should concern itself only with the achievements of the 'Muslim rulers of India.' He widened the scope of that history as no Muslim historian had done — including in the *Ain* an elaborate, sympathetic and careful study of the religious and philosophical systems, and the social customs and practices of the Hindus. He found the source of religious antagonism and bitterness between the Hindus and the Muslims in the belief that the Hindus committed *shirk*, that is, associated the attributes of God with human beings and their images. The charge against the Hindus, Abul Fazal asserted, was baseless. Careful investigation and inquiry show that the Hindus subscribe to the concept of one God. Yet, the misunderstanding was so deep-rooted as to lead to bitter antagonism and even bloodshed. The historian makes a plea for complete religious toleration since persecution of any kind was irrational and futile.⁶⁷ After Al-Biruni, it was Abul Fazal who made a systematic attempt to understand Hindu religion and society in proper perspective. His attempt resulted in one of the best examples of historical objectivity and detachment. Abul Fazal's outlook on Indian history proved to be of abiding value. It went a long way in popularizing the secular nature of the Mughal government under Akbar and his policy of *sub-i-kull* (peace with all).

Sources and Method

Abul Fazal collected sources of all kinds and Akbar helped him in all possible ways. Records of many events were collected from the Imperial Record Office established by Akbar in his nineteenth year of reign. Royal commands were issued to the provinces to those who from old service remembered with certainty or with a minimum of doubt the events of the past, should copy their names and memoranda and transmit them to the imperial court. Great pains were taken to procure originals or copies of most of the orders which had been issued to the provinces from the accession. Likewise, the reports which ministers, high officials and military commanders had submitted about affairs of the empire and events in foreign countries were examined. Research also included interrogating the principal officers of state, grandees, dignitaries, and the old members of the royal family. All oral statements were reduced to writing.

Abul Fazal expended on the sifting of evidence the same labor and research bestowed on collecting material. Facts were marshalled with the help of the highest scientific experts. Accounts were collated, and put to the test of reason. The contradictions and imperfections in the treasures of information amassed were corrected with reference to Akbar's 'perfect memory'. The historian tells us that for each event he took the written testimony of more than twenty intelligent and cautious persons. Every account was put to the most detailed scrutiny and special care was bestowed on the chronology of events. The original draft of the *Akbar-namah* was revised five times before it was submitted to Akbar. No historian in India so far had been so insistent on the need for historical methodology and none brought it to such perfection as Abul Fazal.

Content

The first of the two parts of the *Akbar-namah* deals with Akbar's birth and the reigns of Babur and Humayun, while the second tells us of Akbar's reign to the end of the forty-sixth year. The famous *Ain-i-Akbari* is a detailed, descriptive statistical record of the Mughal empire in the sixteenth century. The *Ain*, according to H.S. Jarret "will deservedly go down to posterity,"⁶⁸ for the immense mass of exact information it provides—the extent of Akbar's empire, its resources, condition, population, industry and

wealth. Nothing is left out and the accounts are rendered to the smallest detail. The data presented range from "the revenue of a province to the cost of a pineapple, from the organization of an army and the grades and duties of the nobility to the shape of a needle-stick and the price of a curry-comb."⁶⁹ Moreover, the *Ain* contains an elaborate account of Hindu culture in its most varied aspects. The sympathy and care with which Hindu society is studied, besides attesting to the author's objectivity and detachment, symbolizes the new enlightened attitude of Akbar's empire. In it are found, too, the 'Happy Sayings of Akbar', and the autobiography of the author. The *Akbar-namah* and the *Ain-i-Akbari* together have bestowed upon posterity the most detailed, complete and authentic account ever left of an empire and of one of the grandest personalities of world history.

Historical Causation

Regarding causation in history, Abul Fazal, like all medieval Indian historians, assumes that men's behavior springs from their nature, and this behavior causes individual events. Akbar is an exception to this rule since he is a semi-divine person whose actions fall beyond the pale of reason and ordinary causation. The categorization of human nature is moral—into good or wicked, or good but susceptible to evil influences. There was little scope for explanation and generalization, since Abul Fazal like most medieval Indo-Muslim historians, thought of history as a collection of individual events or matters relating to individual persons or institutions.

Subjectivity

The first among Abul Fazal's serious limitations as a historian was his subjectivity, which was as intense as that of Barani or Badauni, and which expressed itself in an abject partiality for his patron. All reason, moderation and restraint left him in defending and extolling Akbar who was always right because he could never err. The motives behind Akbar's military expeditions whether against a Rajput prince or a Muslim ruler, are invariably judged to be just and laudable.⁷⁰ The explanations and justification do not always fulfil the conditions of historical objectivity. He is unfair and even hostile to Sher Shah as he seems to have thought that the great

... was the enemy of Akbar's father. And though singularly free from rancor and personal recrimination, his old grievance against the *ulama* seeks full vengeance through his powerful pen. His account of Akbar's disgust and breach with the *ulama* cannot be regarded as impartial.⁷¹

Credulity and Flattery

Credulity and flattery must be reckoned the second great defect of the *Akbar-namah*. The favorite courtier, the trusted friend and secretary of Akbar, could not but have written an official history, but the author's belief in what he thought to be the divine qualities and powers of his patron resulted in *Akbar-namah* being a panegyric. Like a child, Abul Fazal believe in Akbar's extraordinary spiritual powers which verge on the supernatural, and his qualities of prescience which amount to prophecy. Siddiqi writes: "It is really painful to keep company with Abul Fazal in these weak moments and superstition."⁷² Harbans Mukhia cites two examples: When the apostle of reason appears to have fallen a victim to credulity and superstitious. The apostle of reason appears to have fallen a victim to credulity and superstition.⁷² Harbans Mukhia cites two examples: When the feeble-hearted were depressed for want of rain at a particular time, says Abul Fazal, Akbar engaged in prayer and shortly afterwards there was a downpour. Again, when Akbar plunged his horse into the flooded river, Mahindri, in Gujarat, "by the fortune and miracle of his sacred person," the river became fordable.⁷³ Most Western scholars judge the author of the *Akbar-namah* as a shameless flatterer of Akbar.

Plagiarism and Suppression of Facts

Lastly, Abul Fazal has been charged of plagiarism—of deriving information from sources which have not been specifically acknowledged. Jarret remarks:

The sources from which he derived his information are never acknowledged...he not seldom extracts passages word for word from other authors undeterred by fear, or heedless of the charge of plagiarism.⁷⁴

The account of the Hindus in the *Ain*, which draws heavily on Al-Biruni, goes unacknowledged. There are instances, says Mukhia, where Abul Fazal makes changes in words or nuances in the sources by adding or omitting words or phrases.⁷⁵ An equally serious charge

brought against the author of the *Akbar-namah* is that of suppression of facts—of glossing over certain events and facts unfavorable to the legend of Akbar's ability and wisdom. Thus Abul Fazal is silent on the ruin of large areas of cultivated lands and the terrible suffering of the ryots which the *kasari* system of land-revenue settlement entailed. These issues have been recorded by Badauni and corroborated by Nizam ud-Din Ahmad.⁷⁶

Style

The history in which Abul Fazal celebrated Akbar and his elaborate imperial edifice became a literary edifice as well. In the *Ain-i-Akbari* and the *Akbar-namah*, Persian prose achieved two masterpieces, and Abul Fazal's inimitable grand style is much admired by the Orientalists for the force of words, the structure of sentences, and the elegance of periods.⁷⁷ But later readers have found the *Akbar-namah* unnecessarily ornate and verbose. Elliot on the authority of Robinson, has found fault with that style as rhetorical and unnatural, and the narrative itself as florid, fickle and indistinct, overloaded with commonplace reflections and pious effusions.⁷⁸

Assessment

There is a striking difference of opinion regarding Abul Fazal's accuracy as a historian. He is accused of gross flattery, suppression of facts, and dishonesty. His *history* is consequently regarded as not doing justice to Akbar. "Abul Fazal is not for a moment to be lampared either in frankness or simplicity," with Comines, Sully, Clarendon, and other ministers who have written contemporary history.⁷⁹

There is truth in all this criticism. But when every discount has been made, there is much to be said in the historian's favor. The new methodology that Abul Fazal introduced—the extensive collection of original sources and their critical investigation (the first of which Ranke insists), was the most advanced attempt so far made in Indian historiography. The systematic collection of data by the use of official records, and the rigorous investigation of the authenticity of every piece of information make the *Akbar-namah* a genuine work of research. Among medieval historians Abul Fazal alone can lay claim to a rational, secular and liberal approach to history.⁸⁰ The new approach was of abiding value, and had the

effect of widening the scope of Indian history in two directions. First, in consonance with Akbar's new concept of a national empire, Abul Fazal's work went a long way in turning medieval Indian history from the narrow confines of a story of the Muslims in India into a national history in which the Hindus and their life and culture found a place. Second, alone of the medieval historians, Abul Fazal left an account not only of the political institutions and administrative arrangements of north India in the sixteenth century, but a description of the country and the manners, customs and popular beliefs of the people. Thus, for the first time, the governing classes were brought to the foreground. The charge that Abul Fazal's deified Akbar is true enough. But it must be added that he was not his epic round the personality and achievements of a real hero, but saw in Akbar the ideal monarch whom he made a legend for the Indian people. The halo with which his book surrounds Akbar remains undimmed to this day. An enlightened friend asked Abul Fazal about the *Akbar-namah*: "Will one out of thousands come into existence who will read this glorious volume aright, and be instructed by the new magic of its method?" The author's own assessment of his work could be read in his answer: "I am preparing a dainty morsel for the Unique One of Time. What have I to do with the crowd?"⁸¹

3. Historiography from Jahangir to Aurangzeb (1606-1707)

The practice of writing *Memoirs* and official annals as well as private histories continued under Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, though no work could measure up to the *Akbar-namah*. Mirza Asaf Khan's *Iqbal-namah-i-Jahangiri*, written at the instance of the Emperor Jahangir, gives an account of Babur, Humayun, Akbar and Jahangir. For the first seventeen years of Jahangir's reign the author mainly depended on the emperor's own *Memoirs*, *Ma'athir-i-Jahangiri* is an important history of the period, completed in 1633. It was written by a certain Khwaja at the instance of Shah Jahan. The author secured the best available evidence, oral as well as written, and made good use of them.

Inheriting the Timurid love of history, Shah Jahan commissioned Mirza Aminai Qazvini to write the history of his reign. But the emperor disappointed of Qazvini's performance in

appointed Abdul Hamid Lahori with the task. Taking Abul Fazal as a model, Lahori (d. 1654) wrote a detailed account, the *Shah-namah*, though many of its details were of interest only to nobles and courtiers of the time. Yet the work gives a deep understanding of the political, social and cultural life of the period. Lahori informs us of the devastating of the peasants caused by the famine of 1630-32 which suffered Gujarat and the Deccan. "Life was offered for a loaf, but none would buy...Men began to devour each other, and the flesh of a son was preferred to his love."⁸² This is an amazingly incredible piece of exaggeration it is, however, corroborated by the English Factory Records. And the *Shikharat* of Shivaji's deified Akbar is true enough. But it must be added that he was not his epic round the personality and achievements of a real hero, but saw in Akbar the ideal monarch whom he made a legend for the Indian people. The halo with which his book surrounds Akbar remains undimmed to this day. An enlightened friend asked Abul Fazal about the *Akbar-namah*: "Will one out of thousands come into existence who will read this glorious volume aright, and be instructed by the new magic of its method?" The author's own assessment of his work could be read in his answer: "I am preparing a dainty morsel for the Unique One of Time. What have I to do with the crowd?"⁸¹

Waris, Waris added at the end of the work a list of the poets, scholars and poets who flourished during the period. In the matter of history writing as in other matters of culture, Aurangzeb was not enthusiastic like his predecessors. He is reported have ordered that none was to chronicle the events of his reign. Yet, he did not put a sudden end to the practice of his predecessors, and directed Muhammad Kazim to write an account of his reign. Kazim began work on the *Aurangir-namah* which was to be the official history of the reign of Aurangzeb. But hardly had he brought it to the eleventh year when the emperor withdrew his permission and patronage. Whatever the reason behind the prohibition, the religious spirit was probably a decisive factor in the case of this puritan emperor who had concluded that "the cultivation of internal piety was preferable to the ostentatious display of his achievements."⁸³

4. Historiography in India in the Eighteenth Century

Aurangzeb's prohibition could not stop history writing which continued into the eighteenth century and left a sizable output of historical literature. Muhammad Saqi Mustaid Khan's *Ma'athir-i-Aurangiri* was a good history of the reign of Aurangzeb. The author does not mention his sources. But he had access to official records

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