



Contribution of Arab Muslims of Middle Ages in Historiography

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Abstract : The Quran mentioned the events of various prophets in many places, and the description of cities, villages, tribes as well as dying nations also mentioned in it. In addition, future events have been mentioned in several places as predictions, like signs of Qiyamat (Judgement day), situations of Qiyamat, resurrections scene, the appearance of Yajuj and Majuj, destroy the world by blowing the trumpet of Israfil (an Angel) and mutual dialogue of Hellish, these are the factors which have encouraged Muslims to write history, and they worked so hard on historiography that other nations needed help. So, the famous historians like Obaid bin Shabrama, Abdul Hakim Misri, Balazuri, Hafiz Muglatai, Haji Khalifa, Ibn-Ishaque, Ibn-e-Hisham, Ibn-e-Qutaiba, Ibn-e-Jarir Tabari, Masudi, Ibn-e-Asakir, Ibn-e-Khallikan, Muhammad Sharastani, Imam Zahbi and others wrote so many books on the subject of history that the world remembering their services. This paper is attempted to highlight the glorious contributions of Muslim historians of Middle ages.

Keyword: Narrators, Historiography, Arabic Books, Biography, Historians, European Scholars, Middle ages, Jurisprudence, Nation.

Introduction: Since the Muslims had to be aware of the conditions of the previous nations. So, the Holy Quran has repeatedly mentioned the previous nations. Therefore, the spirit of researching Quranic events proved to be the primary impetus for Muslim historiography. In addition the biography of prophet and Magazi itself played an important role in the development of history the historiography of Muslims can be traced back to Sira and Maghazi. The greatest achievement of Muslims in the field of Hadith, History and biography is the subject of Asma-al-Rizal, this is the subject in which the narrators are tested to find out the authenticity of the hadiths. Therefore, in order to know the authenticity and validity of hadith the Muslims have invented a subject to know the condition of narrators which is known as Asma-ul-Rijal. The benefit of this subject was that the conditions of about twelve thousand people who met the prophet would be preserved in history. In addition to these, the conditions of thousands of narrators in Tabeyeen and Taba Tabeyeen and then the narrators from them have also become a part of history. Alloys springer, a well-known European scholar, estimates that the number of people who have survived the subject of Asma-ul-Rijal is five lakhs (5,00,000). He said *"That there is no nation in the world who invented the subject of Asma-ul-Rijal like the Muslims. However, Muslims first worked on the subject of Asma-ur-Rijal and biography, and then they took a step towards historiography. And first of all, Obaid bin Shabrama (d-687 CE) wrote a book named "Kitab-ul-Mulk wa Akhbar-il-Maziyeen" in this subject, for Ameer Muwawiah, then began the golden age of historiography, and the Muslims flooded the river on this subject.*

Significance: The Muslim in present time try to hide their failure by mentioning only the deeds of their forefathers, but they don't know that, enlightened deeds of their forefathers will not benefit them, because in order to be successful in the world they have to make themselves like their forefathers. This will send a message to Muslim community to make them so capable and worthy that these capabilities could benefit them and the country.

Objectives:

- 1) The paper aims to highlight the contribution of Arab scholars of Middle age in propagation of historiography.
- 2) It has been attempted to highlight the names of great Arab historians, like Ibn Jarir Tabari, Ibn Ishaque, Ibn-Khaldun, Ibn Khallekan, Masudi, Yaqub Hamavi and others.
- 3) It aims to highlight the names of European scholars, like George Sarton, Will Durant and others.
- 4) It aims to highlight that the history is the trust of the nation that is why historians should write true history.

Data Collection: The study based on secondary data, the data has been collected from secondary sources, like books, journals and websites for conducting the study.

Scope of the study: This study is restricted to Arab world of middle age only.

Interpretation :

At first the Muslims did their best work on the Sirat (Biography of Prophet) and Asma-ur Rijal (Collection of biographies of Hadith narrators) and then they took a step towards the historiography. So, it is seen that historiography began in the time of Umayyad (661-750CE) Obaid bin shabrama Al-Jurhumi (d-687CE) first wrote a famous book named "Kitab-ul-Muluk Wa Akhbar-ul-Maziyeen" for Caliph Muwawiah (661-680CE) it was the first book in the history. Among those who wrote on the subject of conquests is Abdul Hakeem Misri (d-871CE) he wrote a book in this regard named "Futuh-u-Misra Wa Akhbaru" this book is considered the earliest source of conquests in northern Egypt, Africa and Spain. During this time Balazur (d-892CE) wrote a famous book named "Futuh-ul-Buldan" in which has been written the history of conquest of different region.

After that, the golden age of historiography began and many books in this regard were written. So, it is extremely difficult to count the books which are written by Muslim writers. The frequency of the books can be gauged from the fact that Hafiz Mugaltai (d-1360CE) had seen to a man a thousand books of history in fourteenth century CE.

After him, Haji Khalifa (1608-1658CE) has mentioned thirteen hundred books on the subject of history in his famous book named "Kashf-uz-zunun" some of these books are so thick that it takes a long time to review them. There is a book called "Tareekh-e-Demashque" which is in eighty volumes. These books are also difficult to cover them due to their diversity. The history of commentators, narrators, historians, theologians, jurists, sufis, rulers, ministers, doctors and poets is not only written, but also the history of countries, cities and the provinces have been written separately. Besides the above mentioned works in the field of history the history of different schools of thought, Jurisprudence etc. has been written separately. These works not only written in Arabic but also in Persian, Turkish and Urdu etc. Muslims have written so many books on the subject of history that it is not possible to cover them. Most of these books are unparallel in terms of research quality. With these efforts of Muslim historians the medieval history and culture have been preserved which is also acknowledged by non-Muslims".⁽¹⁾ So, Will Durant said "*Those whom we remember best among the scholars are the historians for to them we owe our knowledge of a civilization that without them would be as unknown to us Pharaonic Egypt before Champollion*"⁽²⁾ Unlike the historians of other nations the Muslim historians have provided a vast collection of information in their books, Will Durant wrote about the excellent services of Ibn-

e-Ishaque, Ibn-e-Hisham, Ibn-e-Qutaiba Al-Dinwari, Ibn-e-Jarir Tabari and Masudi “*At their best these historians excel in the scope of their enterprise and their interest; they properly combine geography and history and nothing human is alien to them; and they are for superior to the contemporary historian in Christendom.*”⁽³⁾ And the Muslim historiography even in the time of decline is best than the historiography of other nations. So, the writer of encyclopedia Britannica said, “*The Syrian and Iraqi historiography of the 12th and early 13th centuries is even as valuable as the western historical writings of this period, and sometimes it is clearly better.*”⁽⁴⁾ However, as a whole, Muslim historiography has a prominent place in the world historiography. Masudi and Tabari are famous Muslim historians; George Sartan mentions the great deeds of the first half of the tenth century and mentions them both with genius muslim scientists. So, he said “*The main task of mankind was accomplished by muslims. The greatest philosopher, al-Farabi was a muslim; the greatest mathematicians Abu Kamil and Ibrahim Ibn Sinan, were Muslims; the greatest geographer and encyclopaedist al-Mas’udi was a Muslim; the greatest historian, al-Tabari was still a Muslim.*”⁽⁵⁾

Ibn-e-Khaldun (1332-1406CE) was a genius in Muslim historiography his name is famous all over the world. The greatest historian of Modern age Arnold Toynbee said while praising him, “*As far as philosophy is concerned, Arabic literature is enlightened by the name of this great man and he is Ibn Khaldun, the Christian world can’t set a precedent even Aristotle and plato were not equal in this respect.*”⁽⁶⁾ This great historian wrote a important book named “*Kitab-ul-Ibar wa Deewan-ul-Mubtada Wal-Khabar, fi Ayyam-il-Arab wal Azam Wal-Barbar*” it is a world famous book P.K.Hitti said “*No Arab writer, indeed no European had ever taken a view of history at once so comprehensive and philosophic. By the consensus of critical opinion Ibn-Khaldun was the greatest historical philosopher Islam produced and one of the greatest of all time.*”⁽⁷⁾

Reynold A. Nicholson said “*Ibn Khaldun Owed little to his predecessors although he mentions some of them with respect. He stood far above his age, and his own countrymen have admired rather than followed him. His intellectual descendants are the great medieval and modern historians of Europe-Machiavelli and Vico and Gibbon.*”⁽⁸⁾

Those scholars have done extraordinary deeds in the history, they are Yaqut Hamavi, (1179-1229CE) wrote a book named “*Mu’Jam-ul-Udaba*” Ibn-e-Asakir (d-1172CE) wrote a book named “*Tareekh-e-Demashque*” Ibn-e-Khallekan (d-1282CE) wrote a book named “*Wafayat-ul-Ayan*” Ibn-e-Hazam (994-1064CE) wrote a book named *Al-Fasl-u-Fil-Milal wan Nihal wal Ahwa wan Nahal*” Muhammad Shahrastani (1076-1153CE) wrote a book named “*Kitab-ul-Milal wan Nihal*”. Along with these books, there are more than hundred books which are very important on the subject of history.

Will Durant said about Muhammad Shahrastani “*Muhammad al-Shahrastani in a “book of Religions and sects ... (1128), analyzed the leading faiths and philosophies of the world, and summarized their history, no contemporary Christian could have written so learned and impartial a work.*”⁽⁹⁾

Muslims have taken up the subject of history out of the limited scope of chronology, a broad and diverse concept has been given, these Muslim historians have written along with the conquests of kings, the tragic stories of defeats also. Imam Zahbi (1274-1348 E) by counting forty categories of history, he has undoubtedly clarified the concept of history of Muslims. In these categories he has narrated not only the history of holy prophets, companions caliphs, kings, ministers, rich, jurists, readers, narrators, writers, linguists, poets, devotees, judges, sufis, sermons, songs, theologians, philosophers, but also narrated the history of disableds, dumbs,

deaf, merchants, artisans, monks, magicians etc. In addition he has described the history of hundreds of professionals and hundreds kinds of people. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Conclusion:

Historians have a great role to play in promoting peace and brotherhood in the country. Therefore, it is their moral duty to present the true history to the nation and refrain from writing false and inaccurate history. Because the false history will have a negative effect on the minds of the students which will threaten the integrity of the country in future. The historians must be free from prejudice and narrow-mindedness, because the prejudice of the historian and their narrow-mindedness can lead to the decline of the country. The historiography of medieval Arab historians is based on absolute truth and is far from prejudice. Because of these qualities of Arab historians in the field of historiography, European scholars learned from them and praised them. History is the trust of the nation, therefore, telling a false history is a great sin, and there is a famous saying that “Pap nahin dekhta bap” sin does not leave its father.

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