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Ibn Battuta: A Traveler or A Historian

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ABSTRACT

We see secular trend in the historiography from the book "Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldun". Arab writers had been pioneers in writings of ansab (genealogy). Their writings have been free from the flatteries of the contemporary kings. They would write very independently while giving the importance to the ordinary events. In Persian historiography, one can easily feel the trend of king-centric writings. In those days, many travellers used to visit different countries for trade, exploration and new knowledge. Ibn Battuta also, came to India with curiosity to know more and more about this land. Although, he was a traveller as well as a scholar by profession, he gives very valuable information about India and its people as well.

Keywords: *Historiography, secular, trend, traveller, historian, Persian, countries*

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INTRODUCTION

Ibn Battuta, a great traveler from Morocco travelled for a long distance from one place to another. He was very fond of travelling, thus investing a very large portion of his life in journeys. He entered Sindh in India and observed the things with very curiosity. Very surprisingly, he describes a large number of events with the help of his marvelous memory. This type of memory which Ibn Battuta is having is very rare in this age. Although, he, sometimes, makes many mistakes while describing the events, this trend in his writing is very rare. In India first part of his writing was written after listening the events from the different people connecting to the royal court. Second part of his writing was written by observing the events by himself.

Ibn Battuta reached in India in 1333, in the reign of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq. He did a very deep study of the character of the Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq. Sultan also gave him many special inspirations and paid a very kind attention on him. Ibn Battuta talks about the generosity of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq and the gifts or the money given to the foreigners by the Sultan. He would respect the foreigners very much. Ibn Battuta was very influenced by the justice of the Sultan Mohammad bin Tughluq and says that the Sultan, even, did not spare his close relatives from the punishments in the matter of a crime (Gopal, 1996).

On the other hand, Ibn Battuta was very surprised on the killings of the people by the Sultan. Very surprisingly, Ibn Battuta was also imprisoned by the Emperor for sometimes after a suspicion. Ibn Battuta understood or could not understand the double character of the Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq, therefore he, himself, did not accept the service of the Sultan again and started his journey again.

Ibn Battuta being the main and the only historian from the Arab World who, personally, visited Sultan and stayed at the court of Sultan for some years. In India, Sultan showed special generosity on him by appointing him the Qazi of Delhi. He also gave him the charge of the tomb of Sultan Qutbuddin Mubarak Khalji. Ibn Battuta remained in Delhi approximately for nine years.

Sometimes we see him performing royal duties and sometimes going to province to province with Sultan. Surprisingly he was taking all events and accounts in his memory. When he described all the stories and events of India without reading any documents before the court of his king in Morocco, we surprise a lot. Ibn Battuta

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shows the image of Sultan very finely and at last, the character of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq becomes an enigma for the Moroccan traveler. Unfortunately, Sultan Mohammad of Delhi once became angry on Ibn Battuta and it was possible that the latter might have been killed but he was saved by good fortune.

After this accident Ibn Battuta renounced the worldly affairs and started a life with the Sufis and saints for a long time. At last, Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq again showed generosity upon him and the former sent Ibn Battuta to the emperor of China with the valuable gifts and money. But he could not complete his journey as he met an accident in the way. Fearing from the atrocities of Sultan of Delhi, Ibn Battuta did not come back to Delhi but he reached Maldives. We find him writing, in Bukhara, while copying from the rocks and, unfortunately, this material was also robbed by the robbers in Malabar.

Surprisingly, he gave very important information from his memory when Sultan of Morocco asked him to do so. We find some mistakes in his descriptions that cannot be accepted. Serials of the cities are changed somewhere and spellings are misspelt while some illusions are seen on the other places. Mohammad Bin Tughluq had a deep respect and devotion for the foreigners so he appointed Ibn Battuta, the Qazi of Delhi. Ibn Battuta worked as a royal servant for nine years. He used to observe the dynasties of the kings, courts, the system of administration, chief events, trades, different cities and the subjects very curiously.

Ibn Battuta's style of description is so impressive that it can bind the people from beginning to end and we find it very interesting and sometimes feel as if we are watching the events before our eyes. Most importantly, he usually did not conceal the events but disclosed the events honestly. After the description of the image of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq by the accounts of Ibn Battuta, it seems that Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq had a very deep interest in the foreigners and he wanted to populate them in India.

The culture and civilization of India have been attracting the people from different countries for a long time. In pre medieval period, many Arab travelers, geographers etc. had given a very interesting description of India. Among all of them, some of the travelers, themselves, visited India but some wrote about India after listening to the others. Very interestingly, the foreigners would take the notice of every minor event that cannot be taken into the accounts by the native writers as they think those events to be very nominal. Tughluq Dynasty has been famous because of the description of the foreigners (Husain, 1976).

Especially, on the reign of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq, many descriptions are found out (Firishta, 2008). Among many foreigners, Ibn Battuta came to India himself but Al Umari and Qalqashandi never visited India. They wrote their descriptions from the authentic books as well as from the listening to the others. Ibn Battuta is famous for his name in the history but he was called Maulana Badruddin in India. Sultan welcomed him in the very good manners and appointed him the Qazi of Delhi, although the Moroccan traveler belonged to the Maliki sect and, furthermore he also did not know the language of India. But Sultan did not listen to the traveler and appointed two Muftis for his help. The traveler remained in Delhi, approximately, eight years. Ibn Battuta reached Sawargdwari when Sultan was staying there in 1333. He did a very deep study of the character of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq.

Sultan, also, gave him many special inspirations and paid a very kind attention to him. Ibn Battuta talks about the generosity of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq and the gifts or the money given to the foreigners by the Sultan. He would respect the foreigners very much.

After spending some years, Ibn Battuta denounced the affairs of the world and became a disciple of Kamaluddin Abdullah Ghazi. Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq, while being in Sawargdwari, called Ibn Battuta and requested him to come to the affairs of the state and proposed him to do the royal service but Ibn Battuta requested to visit Makkah while refusing the proposal of Sultan. But before going to Makkah, he accepted the proposal of Sultan to go to China as an ambassador of India. The name of the book of Ibn Battuta is *Tuhfatunnijar Fi Graebil Amsar Wa Ajaeebul Asfar* but it is famous with the name of *Rehla*. First part of his book is written by listening to the different people but second part was written by direct observation of the Moroccan traveler as he himself was present there at that time.

The description of the Mamluk dynasty, in his book, is in very brief but still very important. The justice system of Sultan Altamash, the intimate relation of Razia with an Abyssinian slave and the killing of Nasiruddin

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Mahmood by Balban are very rare in any other books. He takes a conclusion by listening to the other people that Sultan Alauddin Khalji was the best among all the former Sultans.

Ibn Battuta read the inscription of Multan that describes the victory of Ghazi Malik twenty-nine times over the Mongols. He, also, accuses prince Jauna for Afghanpur tragedy. Battuta gives no details about the tax increase and the use of the token currency but he gives the details of the transfer of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. He tells the reason for changing the capital as the people of Delhi would send the letters to Sultan with full of abuses. He says that after searching operation in Delhi, two persons were found out in the capital. One was to be a blind man and second was to be a lame man. First was shot by a majanik and second was dragged to Daulatabad so as only one leg of him could reach Daulatabad. Very surprisingly, Ibn Battuta says that the tenets of Islam are followed fully in the empire of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq.

The Moroccan traveler, also, mentions the physical condition of India, its climate, vegetables, fruits, dresses of the people, the way of living of the people and agriculture products of the country. He was connected to the royal court very closely. He also describes the royal appointments and their salaries. He tells that in the empire of Sultan Mohammad; there were many people from different countries but all of them were called Khurasani. In the reign of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq, the Moroccan traveler astonished after observing the postal system as well as the intelligence system.

There were also spies in the empire of Sultan Mohammad. Sultan used to get the information from every part of the country. He describes the johar tradition (burning oneself for self-respect), Sati system and the traditions of drowning oneself in the Ganges River. At the court of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq, different types of artists would entertain the people with their classical arts. He tells the diplomatic relation of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq with the kings of different countries. Although, the Moroccan traveler was neither a historian, nor he knew the principles of the history writing. That is why, on his writing, he is dependent on some people.

He neither tried to read any historical book nor did he meet any reliable person of the writing related to the royal court. While writing history, he mixes up the myths with the facts. He, even did not try to know the reality of the events. He took the trust of the statements of Shaikh Ruknuddin that the mind of the prince Jauna was working behind the tragedy of the Afghanpur which led to the death of his father, Ghiyasuddin Tughluq and the latter was alive when the debris was removed from his body. Unfortunately, he was killed by his son, Jauna Khan, says the Moroccan traveler.

The actions, and statements and the character of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq were given in a very bold way. Due to this habit of him, his accounts cannot be taken as suspected. As Prasad (1936) wrote that the reader cannot have the suspicion on the account of Ibn Battuta.

He was a traveler of the world and set out his journey for visiting many countries. Overall, he was not an orthodox writer in giving the details of the events as we, sometimes, feel the one-sided descriptions in some writings of different historians. He would conceal nothing. Neither he distorted the facts nor did he feel shame while describing everything honestly. The diversity of his accounts touched every aspect of the life of Sultan Mohammad. Some of the events are neglected by the native writers. Not only this, but he spread the fame of Sultan in many other countries also. Having spent a very long time in India Ibn Battuta was influenced very deeply. That is why he, usually, compared things of other countries with the things of India. A native of Multan, Sheikh Ruknuddin Qureshi narrated all the events, occurred in the times of early Sultans of Delhi, to Ibn Battuta.

Ibn Battuta gave a wide detail of the time of Mohammad Bin Tughluq. He was observing the things very deeply viz. the nature of the Sultan, the gate of the royal palace (Dar-e-Sara), manners of the people for presenting in the court of the Sultan, the court of the Sultan, procession of Sultan for Namaz (prayer) of Ids, the annual festival of Muslims, the court at the time of Ids, special feast, ordinary feast, generosity of the Sultan, the arrival of the son of the Khalifa. Sultan respected the son of Khalifa a lot, even, he kissed the earth with the son of Khalifa and once he put the guest's foot on his own neck. The image of Sultan seemed mixing by Ibn Battuta.

Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq offered him a lot of money and many valuable things. Same happened with Amir Saifuddin Gadda Ibn Hibtulla Ibn Muhanna who came from Sham (Syria). The detail of marriage of Saifuddin was given by Ibn Battuta, although, Amir Saifuddin made a mistake. On seeing this, Sultan detained Saifuddin

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for one night and ordered to deport Saifuddin from India. At last, by the efforts of Ibn Battuta, Amir was given permission to stay in India. He, also, described the marriage ceremony of the daughters of the vizier of Sultan, the justice of Sultan and his hospitality, his prayers, the implementation of the Shari'ah orders, court of justice. According to him, Sultan would give capital punishment to the culprits for the minor cases. We see Sultan giving capital punishments to his own brother.

Battuta narrated many famous events occurred in India at the time of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq such as- revolts of the amirs in different provinces. He, further talked about the departure of Sultan to Ma'awar land and Battuta's stay in the capital, the management of mausoleum of Qutbuddin Khalji given by Sultan to Ibn Battuta, a journey of Battuta to Amroha and, unfortunately, the Sultan's displeasure on Battuta and the denouncement of Battuta from worldly affairs.

The people who, once, visited or faced Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq, would know the real character of Sultan very well, therefore, Ibn Battuta did not accept the royal service of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq again as he had known the character of Sultan very well by facing a very hard time under Sultan of Delhi, Mohammad Bin Tughluq.

CONCLUSION:

Although, the Moroccan traveler was neither a historian, nor he knew the principles of the history writing. That is why, on his writing, he is dependent on some people. He neither tried to read any historical book nor did he meet any reliable person of the writing related to the royal court. While writing history, he mixes up the myths with the facts. He, even did not try to know the reality of the events. Very surprisingly, Ibn Battuta provides a very valuable and important information about the people of India since the former, personally, visited different places of India in different timings. He describes everything very honestly while disclosing his own faults. Therefore, his account plays a very important and crucial role in understanding the society, people, royal court, Sultan and the elites of that time.

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