

HISTORY OF EARLY MUSLIM EASTERN INDIA: A STUDY OF SOME PERSO-ARABIC SOURCES

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The expression 'Eastern India' during the reign of the early Muslims denoted to the territories belonging to the present- day Bangladesh and the modern Indian States of West Bengal and Bihar. These eastern geo-political units of India came under the rule of the Khalj-Turks in the early thirteenth century. Most of the Muslim rulers and conquerors of this region then preferred to be known as the 'rulers of the east' (i.e. *malik us sharq*)^[1] In fact, even the Sultanat of Bengal in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had effective control over some portions of Bihar region for a considerable period of time.

Much has been written on the history of Bengal and Bihar. It is interesting to note that most of the modern writings are primarily concerned with political history related to the ruling elites. A few scholars, however, have particularly devoted to the study of socio-economic history of the region. In their writings again, many aspects of society, economy and culture are missing. It is further significant to note that the modern scholars lay maximum importance on the second half of the Sultanat and much more on the Mughal phase of history. They conspicuously give a very poor treatment to the foundational phase on which the whole history of the Muslims in Bengal and Bihar rests. The duration of this foundational phase of history may be extended at least up to the fourteenth century when the formation of the Muslim society in Eastern India was in the process.

The main reason behind this kind of development of historical writings on medieval Eastern India, as has been stated above, is that scholars have not yet explored the contemporary historical documents in right perspective. They hold that the extant sources don't sufficiently focus on the initial phase of the Muslim history. They also maintain the

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^[1] Md. Akhtaruzzaman, *Social Life and Urban Centers in Eastern India in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Aligarh Muslim University, 1997) pp. 47-49

notion of the meagerness of materials and say that whatever sources of information they have, do not offer them sufficiently many of the dimensions of society. However, an evaluation of the sources will make us more optimistic.

There are huge varieties of historical literary sources written in different languages as well as dialects. In this paper we have confined our treatment only to some Perso-Arabic literary sources belonging to the first two centuries of the Muslim rule in India.

The earliest Persian literary source on the history of India is Hasan Nizami's *Tajul-Maasir*, which contains Ghoriid as well as the early Turkish history of the period ranging from 1192 to 1217 A.D. Ziauddin Barani, one of the leading historians of the thirteenth century, mentions that Khwaja Sadr Nizami, the author of the *Taj-ul-Maasir* was one of the trustworthy writers and scholars of distinction. Although it is extremely 'florid and ornamental' in style, and contains so much that is 'rhapsodical and traplogical' and 'completely soaked in the spirit of Persian *Fatahnamas*'^{2[2]} but it describes in numerous places, festivals and amusements, and throws valuable side lights on the spirit of civil administration. Very significantly, however, one of its brief passages which records the arrival of Ikhtiyar uddin Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar Khalji at Badaon to meet Qutubuddin Aibak after his conquest of Bihar helps us in determining the exact date of the foundation of Muslim rule in Eastern India. It clearly determines that the date of the conquest of Bengal (i.e. Lakhnauti) is 1205 AD.

Sadid-ud-din Muhammad Awafi's *Jawami-ul-Hikayat wa-Lawami-ul-Rawayat* (1220) is an important source for studying social history of early thirteenth century India. Ziauddin Barani has also cited it.^{3[3]} It is significant to note that this work contains information regarding the rebellion of Balka Daulat Shah Khalji (1228-1230 A.D.) of Lakhnauti against the Sultan of Delhi in 1229-1230 A.D. Hitherto Minhaj Siraj was the only source of information on this event. But Awafi mentions it in details, which has not so far been noticed by the scholar writing the history of Bengal. From Awafi, we come to know the emergence of the independent geo-political unit of Eastern India, of which ruler Nasiruddin Mahmud (1228-1330 A.D.) was entitled as '*Malik-Malik-al-Sharq*'. For writing socio-economic history, this source opens a new chapter. Awafi informs us of the flourishing commercial activities in Cambay (Gujrat) carried out by the Muslim traders under the Hindu-administration. We also get the reference to the development of certain institutions of cultural and political importance. Thus, references to the *karkhana* and *bimaristan* (hospital) are made there. It also provides us with the information of using of scientific instrument called 'lode-stone' (*sang-i-maqnatus*, i.e. compass). I. H. Siddiqui,

^{2[2]} The English rendering of the *Taj-ul-Maasir* is available in Elliot & Dowson's *History of India as Told by Its Own Historians* (henceforth referred as EDHI) Vol. ii, (Aligarh, 1952). For its reference, see, Barani, *Tarikh-I-Firuz Shahi*, (henceforth referred as TF) ed. Saiyid Ahmad Khan, (Calcutta, 1862) p. 14; A.B.M. Habibullah, *Foundation of Muslim Rule in India* (henceforth referred as *FMRI*) (Allahabad, 2nd ed. 1961) p. 9; K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan*, (Delhi, 1959), p. x; K.A. Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, (Delhi, 1983) p. 69.

^{3[3]} Barani, *TF*, p. 14. The writing of Awafi occurs in I.H. Siddiqui's *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions in the Sultanate of Delhi*, (henceforth cited as *Perso-Arabic Sorces*) (Munshiram Monoharlal, Delhi, 1992) pp. 1-43.

the leading explorer of this source, thinks that Awafi's *Jawami-ul-Hikayat-wa-Lawami-ul-Riwayat* "considerably adds to the information contained in the *Taj-ul-Maasir* and the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* on the foundation of Muslim rule in India. Moreover, it provides us with rare insights into the developments of Indo-Muslim culture during its early phase on the one hand and extends our understanding about trade relations between India and the foreign countries, on the other"^{4[4]}

Tabaqat-i-Nasiri is valuable because its author Abu Umar Minhaj al-Din Uthman bin Siraj-al-Din Juzjani, who is otherwise known as Qazi Sadr-i-Jahan Minhaj-i-Siraj Juzjani lived in the eastern region for the period of 1243-1244 A.D. Apart from the fact that it is the earliest general political account, it can also be regarded as 'a compendium of Muslim history,' It furnishes eye-witness account of Ibn Bakhtiyar Khalji's invasions and conquest of Bihar and Nadia-Lakhnauti.^{5[5]} There is some truth in the observation of a modern scholar: "Minhaj's main interest lay in the military operations and the political maneuvers of the period (up to 1259 A.D.) Beyond that he cared to see little or search little".^{6[6]} But inspite of it, his incidental remarks about the points, such as, books and college of Udantvihara, establishment of capital at Lakhnauti, construction of *madrakah*, mosque, *khanqah*, highways etc., the reading of *khutbah*, coining of money, conversion of a tribal chief to Islam, trade in horse, arrival of a diviner and a merchant from Samarqand and Ispahan respectively at the court etc. and the biographical sketches of the leading nobles of Delhi, immensely help us in reconstructing the socio-economic history of Eastern India up to the mid-thirteenth century.

Diwans (collection of poems) of the Persian poet is an uncommon source for the study of thirteenth century society. The Persian poets who attached themselves to the Delhi court during this period in question were generally the men of aesthetics and deep learning. Many of them appear to have compiled their *Diwans*. Of these kinds of documents, the *Diwan* of Saiyid Sirajuddin is a source of great historical value.^{7[7]} Saiyid Sirajuddin otherwise known as Siraji Khurasani is said to have come to India during the early period of Iltutmish's reign (1210-1236 A.D.) and passed away in Delhi in 1254 AD. The importance of Sirajuddin's *Diwan* lies not only in studying the history of Northern India, but when it throws light on the Ashari noble Tajuddin Masud Abu Ahmad Ashari, who has been mentioned by Minhaj as Sharful Mulk-Ashari^{8[8]} with the service of Malik Tughril Tughan Khan (1233-1245 A.D.) of Lakhnauti, then it can directly help us in understanding the nature and formation of the early thirteenth century Sultanat polity in Eastern India. Further, the poet's passionate intention of going to Lakhnauti may suggest the prevalence of a high level of cultural environment at the court of the new rulers. The importance of this *Diwan* is also due to its containing new information about the advent

^{4[4]} I.H. Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources*, p. 36.

^{5[5]} Minhaj Siraj, *Tabaqat-I-Nasiri (TN)*, 2 Vols., Abdul Hai Habibi (ed.), Kabul, 1963, 1964; English tr. MHG Raverty (Calcutta, 1881). Bengali tr. AKM Zakaria (Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1984)

^{6[6]} K.A. Nizami, op. cit., p. 87.

^{7[7]} Sayaid Sirajuddin Khurasani, *Diwan-I- Siraj Khurasani*, ed. Nazir Ahmed (Aligarh, 1972) Also in I.H. Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources*, pp. 53-57.

^{8[8]} Minhaj, *TN*, Vol. ii, p. 14.

of the scientific instrument named *astrolab* (time keeping instrument) in India with the arrival of the immigrants from Central Asia.

Works of Amir Khusrau (1253-1325 A.D.) though full of exaggeration and metaphorical description and written in the most grandiloquent style, but their importance to meet our need, seem to lay at least in two points: first, the author has narrated events with quite faithfully, and secondly, he has visited Eastern India twice - once in the train of Sultan Ghiasuddin Balban (1266-1288 A.D.) in 1280-1281, and again in the retinue of Ghiasuddin Tughluq in 1324 A.D. Further, he might have acquired sufficient knowledge about Bengal and Bihar when being accompanied with Muizuddin Kaiqubad (1288-1290 A.D.) came to the bank of the Sarju (Ghogra) and recorded the minute description of the meeting between the Sultans of Delhi and Bengal in his *Qiran-us-Sadain*. However, among his many writings, the *Qiran-us-Sadain*, the *Khazain-ul-Futuh* and the *Ijaj-i-Khusrau* are especially significant for the reconstruction of the socio-cultural history of Eastern India. These works provide us with information of court-etiquette, holding of banquet party, development of some crafts and devices in the fields of textile, paper and sugar industries etc. They also contain many graphic descriptions of various social phenomena and reference to manner and morals. Considering all this fact, Amir Khusrau as a source, may rightly be regarded as "a historian of contemporary social life".^{9[9]}

The *Basatin-ul-Uns* (comp. in 1325-26 A.D.) of Taj (ul-Mulk) Ikhtisan-ul-Hindi (1301-1351 A.D.)^{10[10]} is a source of great value. This source has not so far been able to draw the attention of scholars of socio-cultural history. Barani also makes mention of Malik Ikhtisan (*dabir*) in the list of the leading nobles of Sultan Ghiasuddin Tughluq (1320-1325 A.D.). Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-1351 A.D.) is reported to have made Ikhtisan, the *dabir-i-khas*. The description of the conquest of a vast region of Bengal and Bihar, particularly that of Tirhut by Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-1351) as contained in the *Basatin* is important because the author was an eyewitness participant in the events. It is also interesting in so far as it corroborates as well as supplements Isami's account of the important events, more particularly of defeating Ghiasuddin Bahadur Shah (1323-1332 A.D.) of Sonargaon-Sylhet and then the conquest of Tirhut of whose account neither Barani, nor Yahiya Sirhindi has left. Though *Basatin* is mainly a book of tales of the kings of Ujjain, Kashmir, Qanauj and China and particularly of King Kishwargir of Kalayan and Queen Mulk Arai of Sarandwip, but in describing Ujjain, the reference to *Shahr-i-Bihar* (i.e. the town of Bihar) is occasionally made. Further, the reference to *dar-ul-shafa* (i.e. hospital) in Central Asia, the progress of art and portrait drawing under the patronage of Delhi Sultans, the scientific instrument of *ustarlab* (astrolab) etc. help us in understanding the socio-cultural advancement during the period under review. According to Siddiqui, "It shifts our focus from pre-occupation with battles, factionalism and court intrigues that dominate the histories of the period."^{11[11]}

^{9[9]} K.M. Ashraf, op. cit., p. xvi.

^{10[10]} S.H. Askari, "Historical Value of Basatin ul Uns: A Rare Literary Work of the Early 14th Century", *Journal of the Bihar Research Society* (JBRS), Vol. xviii, 1962, pp. 1-29; also, I.H. Siddiqui, *Perso-Arab Sources*, pp. 90-101.

^{11[11]} I.H. Siddiqui, *Perso-Arab Sources*, p. 98.

Futuh-us-Salatin (comp. 1348-1349 A.D.), or, the *Shah Namah-i-Hind* of Isami (born in 1310-11AD)^{12[12]} is definitely a source of much value. It is important to notice that Isami's grandfather Izzuddin was a *sipahsalar* in Balban's (1266-1287) army and his grand-grandfather, Zahirul Mulk, was the *wakil-i-dar* of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud (1246-1265A.D.), the grand son of Iltutmish (1210-1236 A.D.). The importance of this work is not only due to the fact that it provides us with the information of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq's (1325-1351 A.D.) conquest of Tirhut and Lakhnauti-Sonargaon, but the incidental references to the concubines, astronomer, spinning wheel etc. contained in it, supplement as well as corroborate our other information of socio-cultural significance.

Writings of Zia Barani (Ziauddin Barani) occupy a unique place in the list of the sources essential for the study of thirteenth and fourteenth century history of Eastern India. Barani's father *Muayyid-ul-Mulk* was the *naib* (i.e. deputy) of Arkali Khan, son of Jalauddin Khalji (1290-1296 A.D.) and he himself had been a *nadim* of Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-1351 A.D.). In passing, however, it is to be noted that Barani's paternal uncle, Alaul Mulk, was the *kotwal* of Delhi under Sultan Alauddin Khalji (1290-1296) and his maternal uncle, Sipahsalar Husamuddin, was appointed as *sahana* of Lakhnauti (i.e. Bengal). He wrote three important pieces of books: the *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* (compiled in 1358-59), *Fatwai-Jahandari* and *Sahifa-i-Nat-i-Muhammadi*. Of these books, the first one is undoubtedly, Barani's *magnum opus*. W. H. Moreland (1929), I.H. Qureshi (1944) and A.B.M Habibullah (1961) attach great importance to this work as a source book. They hold that Barani records agrarian administrative economic information from an official angle of vision. P. Hardy says that Barani treats history as a branch of theology and sees the past as a battle ground between good and evil.^{13[13]} K. A. Nizami opines that Barani had a keen awareness of the changing phenomena of political life and his analysis of situation is basically and essentially political.^{14[14]} Despite this, the information of the *karkhana* of Tughril (1268-1281 A.D.) in Lakhnauti, the process of record keeping, the impact of geography on the mode of life of the people of Bengal, the reference to the *baqqal* (i.e. corn dealers) state-banquet, the advancement of astronomy, the rise of the under-privileged low born class, the life of the Hindus, the emerging class of the *zamindar* etc. frequently mentioned in his works. These are the core evidence for the writing of social, economic and cultural history of any region of India.

Special credit is due to the *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* of Shams-i-Siraj Afif.^{15[15]} The second *qism* (chapter) out of five *qisms* (i.e. chapters) of this book contains an account of two expeditions sent to Lakhnauti and Jajnagar-Nagorkot by Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351-1389 A.D.). Specific references to the geographically unified territory of *Bangalah*, the foot-soldiers of Bengal (*Paikan-e-Bangalah*), the influence of geographical features on the life of the people, Hindu landed proprietors, the foundation of new cities, the institution of slavery, the science of astrology and astronomy, the scientific instrument of

^{12[12]} Abdul Malik Isami, *Futuh us Salatin*, ed. A.S. Usha (Madras, 1948); Agha Mahdi Husain (eng. tr.) *Futuh us Salatin, or Sahnamah-i-Hind*, Vol. i, 'preface', pp. xiii-xiv.

^{13[13]} P. Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India*, (London. 1966), p. 39.

^{14[14]} K.A. Nizami, op. cit. p. 136.

^{15[15]} Shams-i-Siraj Afif, *Tarikh -I- Firuz Shahi*, ed. Maulavi Belayet Hussain, (Calcutta, 1891).

tasgaryal and *astrolab* etc. are the direct corroborative as well as supplementary evidence for reconstructing social and cultural history of the region.

Another two Persian works belonging to fourteenth century: the *Futuh-at-i-Firuz Shahi* of Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351-1389 A.D.) and the *Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi*^{16[16]} of anonymous are extremely important for the study of thirteenth-fourteenth century Bengal and Bihar. The former one while describing the achievements of Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351-1389 A.D.) under twenty-six sub-titles sheds sufficient light on some socio-cultural aspects, such as, development of art and miniature painting, the use of vessels and weapons made of precious metals, the visit of the tombs and *dargahs* by the men and women, the participation of the Muslims in Hindu religious festivals etc.

Of the contemporary Arabic sources, the *Masalik-ul-Absar-fi-Mumalik ul-Amsar* compiled in 1344 A.D. by a leading Arab scholar, Shihabuddin al Umari (1301-1348 A.D.) has some special value. The importance of this work can be guessed by the remarks made by two modern scholars. Otto Spies, the English translator of the work, writes that the *Masalik* "has long been recognized as a book of considerable historical importance and held in high esteem by scholars on account of the careful and well balanced account of persons and places mentioned there in",^{17[17]} and I.H. Siddiqui, the leading analyst of the source says that the work of al-Umari is 'Encyclopedic in Range'.^{18[18]} However, although it was written outside India, but the first part of the book which deals with diverse aspects of the Indian life and culture during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-1351 A.D.), is entirely based on the reports made by the merchants, travelers, scholars, pilgrims and envoys. Interestingly, out of eleven reporters, three, namely, Shaykh Mubarak of Cambay, Abu Safa Shibli of Awadh and Shaykh Abu Bakr Multani were Indians, while one named Shaikh Muhammad Khujandi visited India and served the Sultan in office work. Very significantly, however, the *Masalik* gives idea regarding the evolution of geo-political units of Lakhnauti, Bihar (South Bihar) and Tirhut. Its description of boats and ships in the Ganges of Bengal helps us in estimating the formation of the navy, the rise of ship building industries and the growth of maritime trade and commerce.

The information embodied in the thirteenth and fourteenth century's *parwana*, *farman* (*manshur*), *nishan*, *mishal* constitute a unique type of evidence. These are epistolary and legal documents, which furnish information from official point of view. Of the sources of this category mention should be made of the *parwana* issued by Malik Qutubuddin Aybak (d. 1210A.D.) to Malik Husamuddin Ughalbak in connection with the latter's official obligations in Kol (modern Aligarh) in 1193-1194, the *farman* issued by Sultan Iltutmish (1210-1236 A.D.) to his son prince Nasiruddin Mahmud in relation to his

^{16[16]} Shaikh Abdur Rashid (ed.), *Futuh-at-i-Firuz Shahi*, Dept. of History, Aligarh Muslim University, 1954. Its English translation by the said scholar is also available. The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh published its Bengali translation with Persian text done by Dr. Abdul Karim in 1989.

^{17[17]} Otto Spies, S.A. Rashid and Moinul Haq (eng. tr.) *Masalik ul Absar fi Mumalik ul Amsar*, (Aligarh, 1943), 'Introduction', p. 2.

^{18[18]} I.H. Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources*, p. 102.

appointment as the *wali* designated governor of Lahore in 1217, the *farman* issued to prince Farid Khan, the *wali* of Mabar by Aluaddin Khalji in 1310-1181, and more particularly, the *mishal* served to all classes of people of Lakhnauti by Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351-1389 A.D.) contained in the *Inshah-i-Mahru* or *Tarassul-i- Ainul Mulk* of Ainul Mulk Ainuddin Abdullah Mahru.^{19[19]} These sources contain information regarding the nature of bureaucracy, and more particularly, focus on state's policies towards its subjects.

Hagiological literature that includes *malfuzat* (pl. of *malfuz* i.e. table talks/ discourses), *maktubat* (letters) and *tazkirah* (i.e. biographical accounts) of the Sufi-Saints offers information of historical importance. S. H. Askari is the first Indian scholar to use this source in writing socio-cultural history of medieval India.^{20[20]}

Malfuzat: Of these kind of sources the *Fawaid-ul-Fuad* (the *malfuz* of Nizamuddin Auliya, d. 1325 A.D.) of Amir Hasan Sijji, the *Khairul-Majalis* (the *malfuz* of Shaikh Nasiruddin Mahmud Chiragh-i-Delhi, d. 1356 A.D.) of Hamid Qalandar, and the *malfuzat* of Shaikh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri (1290-1381 A.D.) namely, *Madan ul-Maani* (a mine of sublime Realities, compiled in 1345-46 A.D.), *Khwan-i-Pur-Nimat* (a house full with blessings, comp. in 1349-51 A.D.), *Mukhkh-ul-Maani* (the core of spiritual realities), *Malfuz-us-Safar* (discourses of Sufi journey, compiled in 1360-61 A.D.), *Ganj-La-Yafna* (an imperishable treasure, compiled in 1359-76 A.D.) and *Munis-ul-Muridin* (a companion for novices, comp. in 1374-75 A.D.) are extremely valuable. Another *malfuz* entitled *Ganj-La-Yakhfa* (a treasurer no longer concealed), which records utterances of an early fifteenth century Saint, Husain Muiz Balkhi (d. 1440 A.D.), is also of great value. This Balkhi saint was the nephew and spiritual successor of illustrious saint Muzaffar Shams Balkhi (d. 1400 A.D.). It is relevant here to note that Mr. Paul Jackson, under the able guidance of the celebrated scholar, Sayed Hasan Askari, has rendered most of these *malfuzat* into English.^{21[21]}

Maktubat: Letters of Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri (1290-1381) written to his disciples and contemporary reigning Sultans of Delhi and Bengal, and those of Muzaffar Shams Balkhi (d.1400 A.D.), Nur Qutb-i-Alam (d. 1415) and Ashraf Jahangir Simnani (d. 1425 A.D.) are great sources of information about life and culture in India during the period under review.^{22[22]}

^{19[19]} *Parwana* is a term used for an official document issued by a governor. The written Orders issued by the King and a Prince were called *farman* (or, *manshur*) and *nishan* respectively, see, I.H. Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources*, p. 187, fn.1; *Mishal* is a sort of Proclamation served by a Sultan to the officials or the people. The first *parwana* issued in India is contained in the *Taj ul Maasir* of Hasan Nizami. For all these *farman* and *parwana*, see, I.H. Siddiqui, "The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries Farmans Concerning the Conduct of the Governors under the Sultans of Delhi", *Perso-Arabic Sources*, pp. 167-189.

^{20[20]} *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. xlvii, 1948, p. 32; *The Proceedings of the Pakistan History Conference*, Vol. xxi, 1953, p. 4; *JBR*, Vol. iii, 1966, p. 181.

^{21[21]} Paul Jackson, *The Way of a Sufi: Sharafuddin Maneri*, (Idarah-i- Adabiyat-I- Delhi, 1987).

^{22[22]} *Maktubat-i-Shaikh Nur Qutb-i-Alam*, Persian MS, Subhan Allah No. 297671/18, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh; *Maktubat-i- Ashrafe*, Persian Ms. No.27, Dept. of History, AMU, Aligarh; *Maktubat-I- Muzaffar Shams Balkhi*, Persian Ms. Acc. 1859/2 Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library, Patna.

Tazkirah: Of this category, the *Siyar-ul-Auliya* (lives of the Saints especially the biographical sketches of the Chishti Sufi Saints: a collection of the discourses of Nizamuddin Auliya, (d. 1325 A.D.) by Amir Khurd and *Manaqib-ul-Asfiya* (the glorious deeds of the Saints; the earliest *tazkria* of the Firdausi Sufi Saints) written by Shaikh Shuaib Firdausi deserve to be mentioned here.^{23[23]} The particular importance of these kinds of sources lies in the fact that they are accrued from a source of different genre, which had little to do with politics. These sources focus on some special aspect of society and culture, such as, role of the *khanqahs*, slave-girls and their manumission, conversion to Islam, socio-cultural interactions between the Hindus and Muslims, the rise of the non-Muslims and so on.

Among the travellers, Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Mohammad bin Ibrahim of Morocco who is widely known as Ibn Battuta (1304-1377 AD) appears pre-eminently for his travel accounts. He is the writer of the famous work in Arabic *Tuhfat al Nuzzar fi Gharaib al Amsar wa Adjaib al- Asfar*. This work is commonly known as *Rehla of Ibn Battuta*. He made an extensive journey through the territories of India and South and South-East Asian countries during the period of 1333-1347 AD. He visited Bengal in 1343-1345 AD. Its significance in studying socio-economic history of Eastern India lies in the fact that a separate section of the work deals with the life and conditions in Bengal, which the traveller witnessed during the time (1343-1345 A.D.) of his stay in this region. It is true that some of his information regarding political succession of the Sultans is not correct. But besides its containing many corroborative evidence of socio-economic importance the *Rehla* establishes the historicity of Shaykh Jalal Mujarrad (an early fourteenth century saint) of Sylhet and provides us with the information of the relations between the Sultans and the *Fakirs*, the existence of market economy, growing commercial links of Bengal with the Maldives, Ceylon, Sumatra and China, and more specifically, the prevalence of the cheap living cost of the people. Mahdi Husain, one of the leading English translators of the *Rehla* considers it as 'a mine of history, an abundant source of information for almost all kinds of history of the period covered by it.'^{24[24]}

We have a very rare piece of Perso-Arabic document produced in Bengal in the early thirteenth century. Its name is *Haudul Hayat*. It is the Arabic translation of the Sanskrit work on Hindu philosophy and religion entitled *Amrit Kund* (cistern of honey) written by Bhoj Brahmin (or, Makama?), a *Yogi* from Kamrup (Assam). A leading Muslim scholar named Rukunuddin Samarqandi made the Arabic translation of that Sanskrit work at the chief mosque of Lakhnauti during the time of Sultan Ali Mardan Khalji (1210-1212). It is evident that the Persian translation of that work was also made at that time under the title of *Bahrul Hayat*. The Persian version of *Bahrul Hayat* rendered by Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus Gwaliari (d.970A.H/1562AD) is now available.^{25[25]} It appears that the Persian

^{23[23]} Shuaib Firdausi, *Manaqib ul-Asfiya*, Nurul Afaq, Calcutta, 1895; Hamid Qalandar, *Khairul Majalis*, Aligarh 1959; Amir Khurd, *Siyar ul Auliya*,

^{24[24]} *Tuhfat al- Nuzzar fi Gharaib al Amsar wa Adjaib al Asfar* (ed.) Defremery and Sanguinetti, 4 Vols., Paris, 1853-185; Reprint: Cairo, 1287-1288, 1322AH. Mahdi Husain, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, Baroda, 1976, p. xviii.

^{25[25]} The Ms. of *Haydul Hayat* is preserved in the Pakistan Museum of Karachi at Majmua no. N.M. 1972- 04. It contains 387 folios. *Bahrul Hayat* is printed in Delhi, Rizvi Press, 1311 AH. For details see, Nazir Ahamad, "The Earliest Known Persian Work on Hindu Philosophy and Hindu Religion", *Islamic Heritage in South Asian Subcontinent* (ed.) Nazir Ahamad & I.H. Siddiqui, Jaipur, 1998 , pp. 1-18.

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translation widened the circle of the readers of the book. The book basically focuses on Hindu philosophy and the mystical dimension of Hinduism. It is one of the earliest examples indicating the intellectual interactions of the two religions, Islam and Hinduism in India.

This is a short attempt only to emphasise the fact that there are assortment of sources, both literary and archaeological, which throw good light on the social and cultural life of Muslim Bengal, but which are yet to be used to break the stereotype manner. Furthermore, there are manuscripts preserved in various old *khanqahs*, madrasahs, mosques and libraries which are yet to draw attention from scholars. Medieval literary sources giving social and cultural conditions seem to be quite abundant, but seldom used. Information contained in these sources lead us to analyse many new dimensions of society and culture during the period under review. These new aspects of society and economy include social stratification, social mobility, pragmatic literacy, nature of bureaucracy, interfaith relations and dialogue, cultural interactions, development of technology and industry, growth of trade and commerce, process of urbanization, emergence of money economy and so on and so forth. In short, a minute study of the existing literary sources will certainly help us reconstruct socio-economic history of Eastern India during the foundational phase of the Muslims.

SOURCE: Journal of Asiatic Society of Bangladesh
